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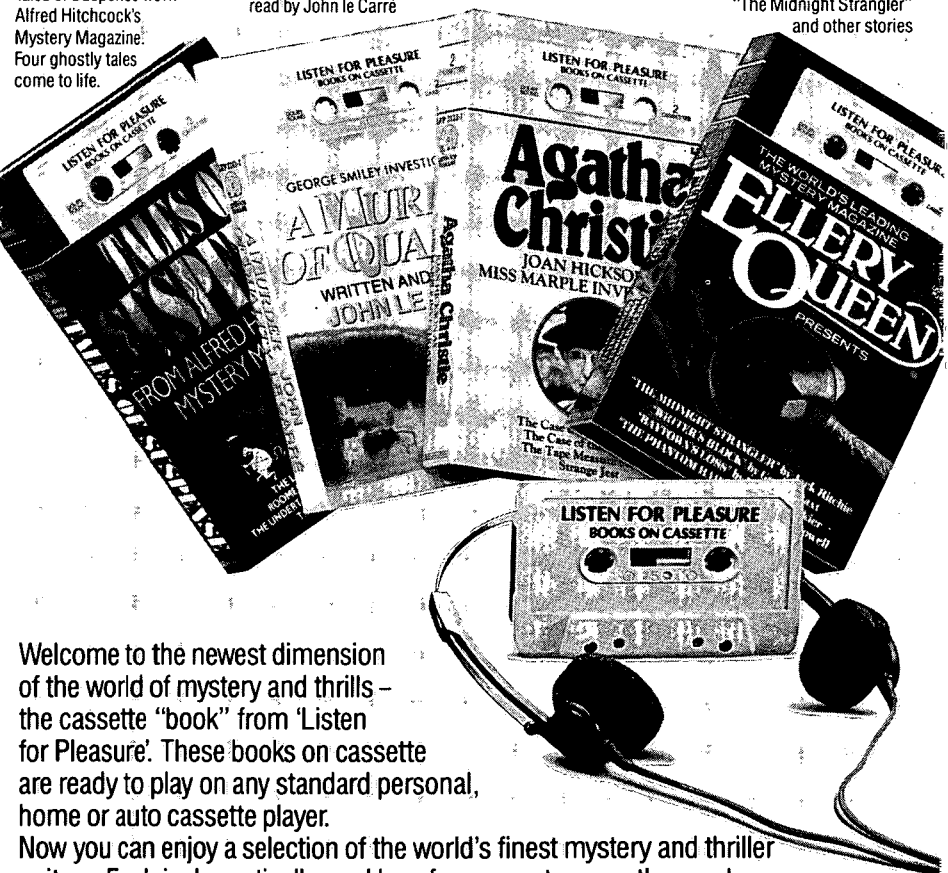
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EDITOR'S NOTES

by Cathleen Jordan

Want to try solving a real-life mystery? We've got a good one for you that's been puzzling us for about a year now. In August 1986 some friends who own a weekend house in the country—on an isolated, heavily wooded mountainside in New York—arrived one Friday evening to find that someone had come calling, Goldilocks-style, in their absence. Only these folks, on the whole, were considerably neater than Goldilocks; in fact, they seemed to have a passion for cleanliness (see the list below). Nor were they regulation burglars in other ways. Left untouched were the TV, the stereo, the Nikon camera—in short, almost everything of real value. They *did* take the following:

four coffee cups (leaving two

in the cupboard), but no saucers, and none of the coffee mugs all the toothbrushes (there were four)

all soap, detergent, Clorox, SOS pads, toothpaste, razor blades, shaving soap

all plastic garbage bags, paper towels, paper napkins, toilet paper, boxes of Kleenex

all the flashlight batteries (but not the flashlights)

beer and some inexpensive wine, leaving behind good wine and liquor

all the canned goods and frozen food

several unopened boxes of pasta, but not the opened ones

all the coffee but no tea

two coffee cans of bacon drippings from the refrigerator

several bath towels and hand towels, no sheets

(Continued on page 150)

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FICTION

The Haitian Murders

by Gregor Robinson



Illustration by Glenn Wolff

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Jimmy Stewart in *Vertigo*.

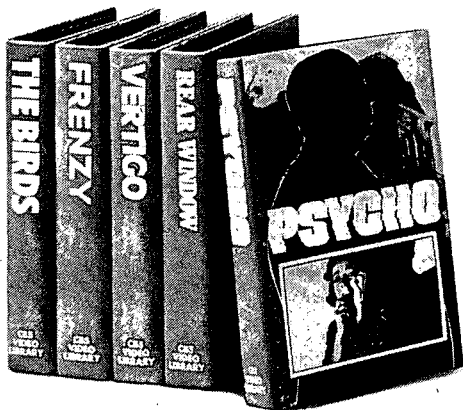


Vera Miles in *Psycho*.



Grace Kelly and Jimmy Stewart in *Rear Window*.





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(Continued from page 6)

I looked up at this, as though to ask a question.

"There was an understanding between them—that's the rumor among the Haitians," he said.

This was quaint usage, not uncommon in the islands, and it was more than merely usage. A certain part of the Haitian community was very formal about these things, very old fashioned.

"An understanding?" I said. Now I was thinking of a motive other than robbery.

"The daughter was at the hotel until almost midnight and she was home with Madame Dell after that," said Constable MacMahon. "So it wasn't her." He had noted my suspicion. "It probably has to do with drugs." He seemed resentful that the authorities in the capital were not more interested in our murder.

"Surely not," I said. I had confirmed that the passbook was Pierre's and now had a record of his current transactions before me. "He didn't have enough money for someone in the drug trade."

"Something to do with the tourists then," said Constable MacMahon doggedly. It was a reasonable guess, for everything on the island was connected with either drugs or the tourists, or both.

"There's nothing unusual in his bank transactions," I said. To save Constable MacMahon the trouble of reading the figures upside down, I flipped the page half around on my desk, then waited while he fumbled in the breast pocket of his shirt for his bifocals.

"Lump sum deposits every now and then." I pointed out the figures with a pencil. "Not so very large, really. That would be consistent with payment for the jobs he did. I believe he rebuilt Burnett's dock last summer."

That was how many of the Haitians eked out their living—doing odd jobs and the heavy labor of clearing land and construction, usually on an irregular basis, and usually for pitiful wages. Still, it was better than Haiti. They had crossed the sea in small boats to escape the Tontons Macoute, and they worked hard. Most of the illegal refugees were squatters: they lived in tarpaper shacks and rickety lean-tos which they built on Crown land in the middle of the island. Some had managed to bring a few possessions with them; some even a little money with which to buy the lots on which they lived.

Of the few Haitian families that had houses in the village, Madame Dell was the most prosperous. Her husband had been a professional man, educated in France, who had run afoul of the Duvaliers.

She herself was trained as a nurse. As well as taking in laundry, she worked several days a week looking after an old woman from Connecticut who had a villa out on North Point. Madame Dell's stepdaughter was a waitress at the Majestic Hotel; I had seen her there and she was very beautiful. She had a reputation for keeping to herself, almost sullen: I was surprised she had come to an understanding with anyone. The Haitians were illiterate and ill-clothed and some of them still practiced voodoo, but their culture was more profound, more arcane, and more formal than we knew.

After a couple of days I didn't think of the murder much. I had not known Pierre and I was inclined to agree with Burnett that it was probably some trivial dispute, the settlement of which had been inflamed by liquor. We sometimes heard shrieks from the woods on Saturday nights. If people wanted to kill one another in the bush, well, there was little that could be done about it.

I mentioned the murder to Madame Dell one morning when she was delivering my crisp white sheets. A shadow crossed her face.

"Mr. Rennison, I don't know nothing about it," she said, "but that man, he was no good." She paused. "Always chasing the woman." She looked up as she said this and in her eyes there was a stony look.

Winnie, the girl who worked for me behind the counter at the bank, hinted at the same thing: something to do with women, that's the way the talk among the villagers at Drover's grocery store had it. And then Healey came over from the regional head office in Nassau for his weekly visit. I met him just after the morning ferry had come in. He was walking up the steps from the government dock with two bottles of dark rum which he customarily brought me.

"I hear Pierre the Stud was murdered in the woods." The men who worked the ferry had told him; Healey had lived in the islands for several years longer than I had and he knew everyone.

"The Stud?" I said.

"A ladies' man," said Healey. "With the Haitians. With the villagers. Even went with some of the tourists, the flabby pink ones who come in on the yachts. He did it for money. That's what they say."

Perhaps there was something after all to Constable MacMahon's idea that the killing was connected with the tourists. After Healey's visit this theory started to gain credence; at the Yacht Club there was always fascination at the idea of sexual connections between

On the weekend there was a big regatta with sailboats from everywhere, and none of us thought of death.

I came across Constable MacMahon in the post office.

"Are the murders connected?" I asked him.

"I doubt it," he said.

"What was it this time?"

"Ritual killing," he said darkly. Constable MacMahon had an answer for everything.

Others said that the murders were, the work of a madman. No one was safe: on a small island there is nowhere you can get away

to. At the Yacht Club there was talk of exerting influence on the capital to get more attention paid, to get some real police work done, and indeed a day or two later men came from across the channel to take photographs, fingerprints, and measurements with a brand new metal tape.

"The constable thinks the killings are unconnected," I said to Burnett. We were standing at the Yacht Club bar.

"I don't know about that," said Burnett. "The rumor in the village is that they were killed with the same knife. Let me get you another drink."

Winnie, the girl at the bank, had told me that Madame Dell's demise involved voodoo.

"But she was a Catholic," I said.

It made no difference. To the evangelical villagers, it was voodoo. To the expats, it was the work of a maniac. As for the Haitian community, well, one way or another, they probably knew what had happened, but they weren't saying. The different communities were three solitudes on that little island.

Constable MacMahon came to my house on Sunday morning. I was in bed when he knocked and I answered the door in my dressing gown.

"Sorry to wake you, Mr. Rennison. I wonder if we could talk."

"Now?"

"It's about Madame Dell."

More than a talk it turned out, he wanted me to accompany him down to Madame Dell's house. He was looking for financial records. I didn't understand why he wanted me to go with him; why could he not simply bring me the relevant papers?

"Not allowed this time," he said gloomily. "All these fellows coming from across the channel. Cameras and powders. Can't touch anything. No sir. Very important this time."

Bankers are respected in the Bahamas—they are at the heart of the tax-exile, tourist, and even contraband economy—and perhaps he thought my presence would lend him added authority.

When we arrived at Madame Dell's, people were gathered around watching, for never before had there been anything like this in the village. The Roman Catholic service was over—it was held under the tree at the foot of the government dock—and the entire congregation seemed to have come over to watch these official looking

men. There was also a group of Haitians, people from the bush whom I had never seen before, as well as some other villagers. Constable MacMahon was rather put out; he was being shown up as a bumpkin; the murders had got the attention he had wanted but this was the price.

"Scuse me, 'scuse me," he said gruffly, elbowing his way through the little crowd. I followed close behind.

Madame Dell's house was small and remarkably tidy. I had never been inside before. We entered by the door which faced the harbor and were in the living room. Up a narrow staircase were two little bedrooms and a bathroom jammed under the sloping roof. I watched while Constable MacMahon went through the contents of the table in Madame Dell's room. There were some letters, mostly written in French, one or two old documents, also in French, and the bank passbook. There was a checkbook but I told Constable MacMahon not to bother with it, for business on the out islands is conducted almost entirely in cash and the checkbook had hardly been used.

Back downstairs, the kitchen was crowded with the police officers who had come in by boat earlier in the morning. The body had been taken over to Marsh Harbour where they had a morgue, but there were dark brown-red stains on the unpainted wood table and on the floor where the men were working. I had not been prepared for that.

"What have you got there?" said one of the police officers, a man dressed incongruously in a tie and jacket.

"The woman's bankbook," said Constable MacMahon. "Found it upstairs."

"Well, put it back there, will you?"

Constable MacMahon looked at me. His cheeks were burning. I told him it didn't really matter, I had the account number. He left the room muttering and climbed noisily up the stairs. The police officer in the jacket turned to me.

"You know anyone around here who could translate for us," he said, "French into English?"

"Most of the Haitians speak English," I said.

"It's translation of written material that we need," said the policeman. They were ahead of Constable MacMahon; they knew about the documents upstairs.

"Fellow called Tommas who lives out by Burnett's place," I said. "He is an educated man."

Constable MacMahon returned. We left by the kitchen door.

Behind the house there was a steep bank, covered with scruffy vegetation, at the top of which was the back garden of the Majestic Hotel. A cement walk led from the kitchen door around to the front of the house. We made our way back through the little group of onlookers.

"Bastards," said Constable MacMahon under his breath. He was still fuming about being sent upstairs.

"What about the daughter?" I asked. "Where was she this time?"

"Working at the hotel. I saw her myself. Dropped in at the dart tournament after dinner. They said at the bar she didn't leave until almost twelve, when Mrs. Rainey met her."

"She could have slipped out the back, climbed down the bank here, and been back before anyone noticed," I said. It would have been difficult but not impossible, especially for someone young and agile.

"I suppose it's possible," said Constable MacMahon, casting an eye up the hill, "but tell me, Mr. Rennison, why? Why would she do it? And what about the other murder?"

I could think of an answer to neither question.

At Constable MacMahon's insistence, we went directly to the bank. As with Pierre's account, I found nothing particularly unusual. The balance was larger than might have been expected, but I had heard that Madame Dell was one of the Haitians who had brought money with her. There were regular small deposits (payment for work done, no doubt), more or less regular small withdrawals, and four or five larger withdrawals. "Probably for laundry supplies," I said to Constable MacMahon, "and larger purchases of some kind."

The total balance had declined somewhat over the past few months. Constable MacMahon stared blankly at the upside-down figures for a few moments, grunted, and left the bank without saying a word.

For all their photographs, fingerprint taking, officious scrutiny, tape measuring, and what we later learned was blood type analysis, the police from New Providence did no better than Constable MacMahon at solving the murders. They appeared to accept—or at least caused no one to challenge—the prevailing view on the island: that the first murder was connected with the drug and tourist trade, and the second somehow with voodoo, even though there was not a whisper of evidence for either.

explanation. They never did come to see me; they never looked at those few columns of figures.

I was on the ferry on my way to the airport for one of my infrequent trips to Miami when I met Tommas, the poet who lived out by Burnett's place. He was traveling to New Providence for a meeting of a left-wing exile group; unlike most of the Haitians, he was politically active—he loved Haiti and her mysterious culture. Tommas was older than I was—in his late thirties—and he was, I guessed, rather disdainful of my profession. But I had seen some of his poems—they were in English and were published on newsprint-like paper by a little publishing house in St. Lucia, a thousand miles to the south. He had come to see me shortly after I had come to the islands when he heard I too was a writer. I had been a disappointment to him, both because I did not write poetry and because I fell in so easily with the people at the Yacht Club. He didn't understand that that was part of my business. But we were not unfriendly.

I made some reference to Madame Dell's daughter. She was no longer required to remain for questioning and was planning to leave the islands. No doubt it was because the money she had been left, although not a lot, would enable her to leave.

"Man, it has nothing to do with the money," Tommas said. "She had been dishonored."

I was puzzled. Was he being overly romantic?

"Dishonored?" I said.

Tommas merely shrugged his shoulders.

"Dishonored by the death of her fiancé?" I said.

But he would say no more.

On the plane to Miami I thought about Tommas's remark. Dishonored: it was a word from an old novel. And from time to time throughout the day, I thought about the look on Madame Dell's face when I had asked her about Pierre, and about Winnie, telling me the village gossip that Pierre's murder had something to do with women. She never said it was the tourists.

I flew back to Marsh Harbour late in the afternoon and took a water taxi across the channel to the village. In the evening I walked along the path past Burnett's place, through the scruffy silvery woods to Tommas's hut. The barking of a large German shepherd brought him outside. He calmed the dog. I stood there until finally—and without grace—he invited me into the hut.

"It's about the translations you did for the police who came over

from Nassau," I said. He shrugged his shoulders, then led me to the wooden table in the corner of the room.

The details were there, in those letters tied with a ribbon which we had seen in Madame Dell's bureau. I laboriously went over Tommas's translations. The money had been provided to Madame Dell by the family of her husband—the girl's father—and was to be paid in six installments, the final payment on the day of the marriage. Of course the efficient men from New Providence would not have known about the rumors in the woods—about the understanding between Pierre and Madame Dell's daughter. They should not have been so brusque with Constable MacMahon.

"Did she love him?" I said.

"I would say so," said Tommas. "She slept with him." He would elaborate no further.

"**A**dowry?" said Burnett. We were at the Poolside Bar of the Majestic. The waiter brought our drinks—gin and soda for him, beer for me.

"Which Pierre had almost certainly already spent,"

I said.

"And the girl killed her mother?"

"Not her mother. Her stepmother. Her wicked stepmother, the person who had killed her lover. Perhaps she found the knife. Who knows?"

"Imagine Madame Dell murdering the fellow for that amount of money in the first place."

"It may seem small to us, but it was a lot of money to them. Still, I don't think it was the money," I said. "It was bad enough that he was seeing other women. But breaking the engagement: he had dishonored the woman, dishonored the family. He broke his promise. He was an adventurer. Breach of contract—like an old novel, but with no recourse to a court of law. So Madame Dell followed him into the mangroves where he used to meet her stepdaughter and killed him in the darkness."

"Honor and love. A romantic tale," said Burnett. "How do you know all this?"

"I don't know for certain. But it's in the figures."

I had returned to the bank immediately after visiting Tommas. I took Madame Dell's and Pierre's accounts from the files and quickly compared them. The large withdrawals from Madame Dell's account were followed in all cases a day or two later by

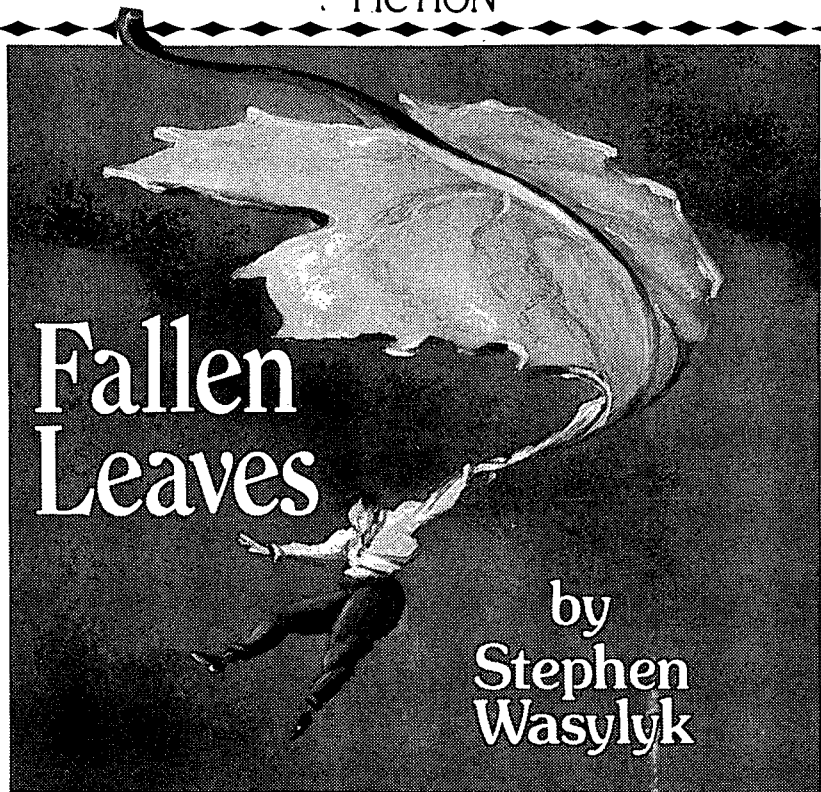
"Why don't you go the police?" Burnett asked.

"How's that?" Burnett bridled a little, so I quoted the law.

Burnett said nothing.

It was a matter of professional curiosity. Before closing the file, I went over the record of transactions in her account. I realized then that what I had told Burnett was wrong, that Tommas, too, had been mistaken. There in the figures were five large deposits. I knew without checking that the amounts were the same, that they had come from Pierre. Madame Dell must have discovered what they were up to—an elaborate scheme to get what I suppose Madame Dell's daughter no doubt saw as rightfully hers. It was not a question of honor and love. I should have guessed, for I was no poet: it was the money after all.

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Side by side, the three graves were partially covered by the golds, reds, and browns of the withered leaves that had drifted down from the tall trees, now glowing amber in the setting sun like paintings in a gallery lighted to bring out their best.

Turnpike travel is a great time-saver, except when a major crash brings you to a halt with nowhere to go and nothing to do except wait, wiping out any anticipated time of arrival you may have had and leaving you thankful only that you hadn't been involved in the accident.

Now that I was here, I knelt and brushed the fallen leaves away from the bronze ground-level grave markers. It seemed the least I could do.

I rose to catch the faint, acrid odor of leaves being burned ille-

gally. There had been a time when we all grew up with that odor as the dependable harbinger of winter, but winter is only a step in nature's inexorable cycle and spring always comes again.

Only in a man's mind can winter remain beyond its allotted time. He carries its coldness with him, and at odd times in odd places memories trigger its chill and he wonders if he will ever be warm again.

Sam King and I liked to ride our bikes to the hill outside of town where we could sit on a stone wall, the valley spread before us and the houses like white chips clustered in a green bowl that was fractured by the ribbon of the river, and we would talk of all the things that fourteen-year-olds talk about, like girls, sports, girls, school, girls, parents, and girls, with an occasional discussion about women.

The wall was more than just a place to sit. Accidentally moving a loose stone one day, we had found a cavity inside that became the secret repository of our possessions, particularly those we didn't want our parents to see.

The daily Greyhound came by, the driver waving. He'd once told us he'd instructed a new driver not to worry about not spotting the turn. Turn left when you see the two kids, he'd said . . .

The roar of the bus had scarcely faded when we saw the figure marching up the road; head up, shoulders back, his stride smooth.

He slipped the pack from his shoulders and dropped it on the grassy shoulder before us; young, perhaps in his mid-twenties, his dark hair long, his face burned brown, a hard fitness showing through the sweat-stained shirt.

"Hi. Know where I might get a drink of water around here?" He ruefully nudged a canteen strapped to the pack. "Sort of miscalculated somewhere along the line."

I handed him the thermos I carried in the basket of my bike.

"We run into the same problem pedaling up the hill."

He sipped and indicated the town. "You two from down there?"

"Yeah," said Sam. "Where are you going?"

"Just walking, but about ready to quit for the day. Know a place where I can put up for the night? Cheap?"

I slid off the wall. "Sure. We'll take you down."

"I'd appreciate that."

We hadn't moved more than a dozen yards when a red Mustang convertible slammed into the turn and pulled up beside us, scat-

tering dust and gravel. My sister had a habit of driving too fast. Maybe Donna thought it was mandatory for a pretty blonde behind the wheel of a red convertible with the top down.

She looked the man over before her eyes settled on me.

"Give you and Sam a lift, George. You can throw your bikes in the rear seat."

The stranger was holding his backpack by one strap. His stride had been strong, but he appeared tired.

"How about him? He's walked a long way and is looking for a room for the night. You can drop him off at Mrs. Thurlow's."

She looked at him coldly. "I never give rides to strangers."

She took off in a spurt of gravel, but I couldn't help but notice the interested glance she threw at him over her shoulder. His smile said he hadn't missed it, either.

"Sorry," I said.

"She's right. She doesn't know me. Pretty town. What is it?"

"Monroe, home of the finest woolen mill in the world, my father says."

He grinned. "I wouldn't argue with him, but I've never heard of it. What brought you two up here?"

"Watching clouds," said Sam. "Ever watch clouds?"

"Sure. I'm a cloud watcher from way back. Used to see how many shapes I could recognize."

Sam glanced at me slyly.

"George says all the puffy ones look like women's boobs."

"At his age, so did I. What do people in town do after dinner?"

"Drink beer at the tavern but mostly just sit around and talk." Remembering that glance Donna threw at him, I decided to shake her up a little. "If you like to do that, you're welcome at my house."

He grinned. "I'll just take you up on that invitation, George. Your father can tell me why Monroe is the home of the finest woolen mill in the world, but since he's sure to ask who the bum is that you invited over, you can tell him my name is Roy Jenson."

I don't know. Maybe if Sam and I hadn't been on the hill that day, if it had been raining, if Roy had continued on—

There is no point in speculating. Perhaps nothing would have been changed because once all the ingredients for a tragedy are rolled into a tube like a firecracker, it doesn't matter who lights the fuse.

The houses in Monroe, particularly in our section, were all painted white, had tall shade trees on the lawns, and were sur-

rounded by white picket fences, which made sitting on the wide porches on cool summer evenings preferable to lounging inside watching the dullness of summer television with the air conditioner humming. The social practice of locking yourself away from your neighbors and the world was still in the future.

He came through the gate about seven and I introduced him to my parents. I could see my mother was a little doubtful, not quite certain whether she approved of a young man from Lord knows where, walking to Lord knows where, but when he shook hands with my father, I had the feeling that they were very much alike and that they understood each other immediately.

It was years before I realized why.

I had always known that my father had been somewhat of a hero during World War II. He never talked about it, but I knew that an ordinary shoebox on a shelf in an upstairs closet held his medals. I'd seen them once, along with a .45 automatic in a worn holster with the letters U.S. embossed into the leather.

He'd held the gun under my nose when I was six.

"I told your sister and I'm telling you. Don't touch it. Ever. Not until you're twenty-one and mature enough to take full responsibility for your actions. Understand?"

Even at six, the tone in his voice told me I'd damned well better understand.

Seeing Roy marching up the road, I should have known that he'd been in the service, and since Vietnam was going on at the time, I should have put the two together.

My father had—with one handshake. Perhaps it had been instinct.

That scene has remained in my mind all these years as the meeting of the warriors, my father's hair thinning and his middle thickening while Roy was lean and hard, but both warriors, nonetheless.

About nine, Brady Wheeler stopped by to take my sister out.

Why she went with him, I had no idea. No one liked him very much, including me, but I suppose it was because his father owned most of the stock in the mill and it was a natural pairing—the son of an owner and the daughter of the manager.

I didn't know the word at the time, but the reason no one liked him was that he was patronizing—the lord of the manor condescending to mingle with the peasants; polite, rude, sarcastic, overbearing, or obnoxious, depending on his mood or the amount of alcohol in his veins; and even though I wasn't supposed to know

about it, using seignorial rights in regard to the virgins of the town—which was why my father always managed to tell my sister in one way or another to be careful.

Brady was pleasant enough to Roy, asking him where he was from and where he was going, and Roy pleasantly enough told him little.

When I went to bed, he and my father were still talking and the next day I learned that he was taking a job at the mill.

I remember saying, "Hey, that's great!"

My father smiled. "Just don't bother him with a lot of questions. He's staying because he wanted to know why I consider it the finest woolen mill in the world, so I suggested he find out for himself. Besides, I can always use a good man."

"How do you know he's a good man?"

"A few more years, and you won't find it necessary to ask."

He was right.

His face was straight when he said Roy stayed because of an interest in fine wool but I suspect he was chuckling inside because he'd seen Roy and his blonde daughter trying not to appear interested in each other.

It developed into what you would call a good old fashioned rivalry for the hand of the fair maiden, which the fair maiden thoroughly enjoyed while my parents worried. Brady had been taking Donna out for a long time and had established what he considered to be proprietary rights. The day my sister told him to get lost because she preferred Roy, which is what we were all hoping for, there was bound to be trouble. Brady wasn't the type to kiss her gently on the forehead and wish her happiness.

One still October night, the odor of burning leaves refusing to move out of the valley, I came home from Sam's, taking a route through all the back yards for the perverse youthful pleasure of setting the dogs to barking, vaulted over our fence, and headed toward the front door so that I could pretend I had used lighted streets.

I had reached the corner of the house when I heard voices. At fourteen, you don't announce yourself when there is the possibility you might hear something you aren't supposed to hear. I pressed close to the yew that marked the corner.

"Tell him tonight or I'm gone."

I grinned. *Give her the word, Roy.*

Silence.

"You know I don't want you to go."

Well, all right! I had never heard such tenderness in her voice.

"Then tell him."

Donna's voice was worried. "If it were that simple, I'd have told him before this. It isn't only me, you know. I have my father and you to consider."

"Your father and I can take care of ourselves. Prolonging it isn't fair to him. He has a right to know. If you're concerned about how he will react, we'll tell him together."

"No. I'll handle it."

"I've heard things about—"

"I know his side of those stories. He isn't like that at all."

"All right. I'll call you in the morning."

Roy's shadow moved down the walk and up the street.

A few minutes later, Brady drove up and my sister left with him.

I went in and up to bed and lay smiling at the ceiling. Roy would make a helluva brother-in-law.

I fell asleep just as the night breeze finally came up and wafted the lingering odor of the burning leaves from my bedroom.

The commotion woke me. I leaped from bed, ran to the stairs and started down, shock stopping me halfway.

Donna was seated on the sofa. Her face was bruised, one eye almost closed, blood trickling from her lip, her blouse torn. She was weeping silently, my mother holding her tightly—her face suddenly ten years older—and murmuring tenderly as though to a child while my father stood before them both, his face carved from granite.

I called down. "What happened?"

My father turned. "Donna had an accident. We'll handle it."

I didn't know what it was about but I'd heard the conversation between her and Roy and it seemed to me that he was entitled to know she was hurt, so I crept upstairs and called him.

He was there in five minutes. My father talked with him on the porch for a long time before they came back in.

Roy walked up to Donna and gently placed a reassuring hand on her shoulder.

She shrank from him as though she was afraid and I thought that strange. My mother jerked her head toward the door.

He took two quick steps before my father caught his arm.

"That's my job," he said.

They stared at each other. Roy shrugged. "This is no time to argue about it. We'll both go."

My father turned toward the stairs. "I'll be right down."

I didn't know where they were going, but I sure as hell was going along. I frantically pulled a pair of pants over my pajamas and thrust my feet into my sneakers as I heard a closet door in my parents' room open, the rattle as a box was shifted, and I peered from the door until my father passed, a gleam of metal in his belt. I followed.

He turned once on the porch, his voice harsh. "You stay home, George."

That was one time I had no intention of obeying and when the headlights of the car turned up the street, I leaped from the steps and began running.

The taillights were already fifty yards ahead of me but there were only two places for them to end up, at the mill or at Brady's house, neither of which was very far away and a car couldn't get there very much more quickly than a kid running hard.

I was running as fast as I ever had in my life when there was a low rumble and the sky ahead flashed as if from lightning and then there was another roar, louder, and the sky started to turn red, the glow blossoming slowly until it lighted the street before me.

Gasping for breath, my legs trembling, I arrived with the town's one fire engine, along with the first of the crowd that piled up behind me.

The mill was more than a hundred years old, built beside the river, the offices facing the street at the front of the long building. Alongside was a paved area, both sides used for parking, a center aisle leading to the loading docks at the rear.

When automobiles first replaced horses and wagons, service stations were few and far between and the owner of the mill had installed a single gasoline pump at the front of the paved area as a company perquisite for his executives. It was a custom that disappeared very quickly elsewhere, but at the mill it had become a tradition that my father unsuccessfully tried to end every time the pump was updated.

I didn't have to be there to know someone had done what my father had always been afraid of—swung too wide through the entrance gate and sheared that pump completely off. The car had ricocheted off the brick wall, spun, and wedged itself into the side employees' entrance before exploding and spraying flaming gasoline and setting the entire building afire. Even though the interior

had been remodeled many times, those century-old floors and beams burned too quickly for the sprinkler system and the one piece of fire equipment to handle.

The burning car told me who it had been. Brady.

With Brady's car jamming the employees' entrance, the people of the second shift were trapped inside. The only way out was through the windows on this side, those facing the river, or through the shipping doors at the rear. They were already open, people streaming out, smoke billowing above their heads.

I saw my father emerge from the confusion and, without thinking, ran into the yard after him. It was a hellish scene, lighted by the fire, two feeble spotlights on the engine, and the monotonous sweeping of the rotating red lights on the two police cars. The heat from the burning building was intense, almost unbearable, the noise deafening. I tugged at his sleeve the way kids do when they're scared and want reassurance that everything will be all right.

Fear for me in his eyes, I could see him yell words I took to be get the hell out of here, George. Hurt, I stepped back. He wrapped an arm around my shoulders tightly, his face softening.

He glanced up at the burning building, the softness wiped out suddenly by a sad resignation and pain, hugged me fiercely, and said something I couldn't hear. He pulled the .45 from his waist, slapped it into my palm as though passing on a baton or standard, and literally threw me toward the safety of the street.

I dodged through the firemen and turned to watch.

Through the smoke, I saw him at the wheel of his car, bumping over the fire hoses. He spun in a tight turn and smashed into the rear of Brady's burning car, backed away and hit it again. And again. And cleared the doorway as the paint on his car began to blister.

The firemen immediately played a spray of water on the entrance and my father and Roy dashed in. They were out in seconds, each half-carrying a man the firemen hurried the rest of the way to safety. Neither hesitated as they went back into the flaming hell of the building twice more to carry men out, but no one defies the odds forever and what stays in my mind is that they had to know that and went anyway.

The third time the old mortar holding the brick wall together yielded to the heat and the wall collapsed without warning, sealing them inside.

My throat went too tight for tears and I knelt there numb; moaning around me, screaming around me, people sobbing, people chok-

ing, the heat on my face fierce even at that distance and then I saw Brady, slumped against a police cruiser, so drunk his head lolled, so drunk he was smiling and the only pleasure that night ever gave me was seeing the deep scratches running down the side of his face. Donna had fought well.

Six months later, my mother died, as much a victim of the fire as the people who had died in it, so the three of them were buried here together, Roy in one of the spaces my father had planned for either Donna or me when he bought the plot. Donna and I never discussed doing anything else. Roy had not only earned it, he had almost become one of the family, and we both knew we could never live our lives out in Monroe.

Donna and I went together to go through Roy's things at Mrs. Thurlow's. The backpack hadn't held much. The most important thing was a folder Donna took. She never did tell me what was inside except that Roy had no next of kin, but a military chest ribbon slipped out and fell to the floor. The colors burned themselves into my mind, and years later I learned it was a Silver Star.

Nothing much was said about what Brady had done to her, the rape lost in the larger tragedy. No one outside the family was told except Sam. Sam was my friend. I told him everything.

Brady was tried and convicted on a half-dozen counts but never spent a day in prison because of his father's money and influence. The mill was never rebuilt. Monroe, like many other one-industry towns, faded, and was only now beginning to recover because it was a nice place to live and newer, high-speed highways made commuting to work easier and faster.

That fall Donna left for the state university she had never intended to attend, while I moved in with Sam's family until I finished high school. Donna came back once, for my graduation and because that was the year she turned twenty-one and there were papers to be signed at the family attorney's office. We both left the next day, she in her car and well ahead of me as though she couldn't wait to get out of town, me in mine following reluctantly because it was difficult to leave Sam, more like a brother now than a friend. We had the summer to settle in before I started my freshman year and she finished up as a senior.

She hadn't been back since. I tried to visit the graves each year on the anniversary of the fire.

Headlights on, a police car crunched gravel as it slowly rolled toward me.

Sam stepped out, heavy in his chief's uniform, and held out his hand.

"Good to see you again, George. When you weren't here by noon, I was afraid you wouldn't make it this year."

"Ran into one of those turn-off-your-engine-and-take-a-nap tie-ups on the turnpike."

We stood for a long moment, old friends clasping hands, grateful another year had passed without the news that we would never meet again.

He tapped my shoulder. "I see you're a major now. Congratulations. Still flying?"

"When I can. A squadron CO has a great many things to do."

"How is Donna doing?"

"Still the high powered New York bank executive. Dresses like an ad in the *Times*, walks fast, and yells at people a great deal."

"Not married yet?"

"Not yet." I didn't say she probably never would be.

"And you?"

"I move around a great deal, Sam."

He seemed to consider what to say next.

"I have something to show you."

He brought a heavy object wrapped in newspaper from his car and handed it to me.

I unfolded the paper. Inside was a .45 automatic, crusty with a deep layer of rust. It lay heavy in my hand, recalling more memories.

"Where did you get this?" I tried not to sound too interested.

"Kids never change, I guess. The other day a couple of them found the loose stone of that hiding place in the wall we used to use for those *Playboy* centerfolds we didn't want our parents to know about. Anyway, one of the kids poked his hand inside and there it was."

I weighed it in my hand. "Why would anyone want to hide it?"

"It can't be proved because it's rusted solid, but since Brady was found in his car only a few yards down the road with a .45 slug in his chest, I'd say it's the gun that killed him seventeen years ago. If I didn't use it and hide it there, and you couldn't because you left that afternoon for the university, who did?" He paused. "You didn't even know Brady had been killed until I wrote you about it."

He said it as though reassuring himself.

I shrugged. "Since kids never change, it's likely that one found

that cavity before we did. What are you going to do with the gun now?"

He rewrapped it carefully. "That's a problem. It's dangerous, you know. Probably loaded and there may even be one in the chamber. The shells won't rust and are probably still live, which makes me worry. Old shells are very unstable. For all I know, a sudden jar could set one off and cause the gun to explode. I think throwing it in the river would be the safest thing for everyone concerned."

"I'd agree, if it doesn't get you into trouble. The state police lab might still be able to read the serial numbers, even though they're not visible, because the molecules in the metal are rearranged when the numbers are stamped."

"I thought about that but do you realize how long it would take? And even if I did get a number, it might not do much good. This could be a service piece, and a lot of the weapons brought home by servicemen were never registered, which means going through old army records while the gun sits around with the possibility of someone's being hurt or maimed every time it's touched."

"Sam, I think you're talking yourself out of doing anything at all with the damned thing," I said slowly.

He leaned on the roof of the car with folded arms and stared across the river at the town. The street lights had come on in the dusk. The white houses were still the same, but there were many in the sections where the mill workers had lived which were boarded up and dark; that way now for twenty years. The fire had not only killed twenty people but had destroyed many more lives.

When he turned, the words came thoughtfully. "You're a little out of touch, George, because you come back only once a year, so maybe you don't realize that the town's hate for Brady never faded. He didn't rape only your sister that night, he violated all of us. Hell, the people here don't give a damn who killed him. They just wonder why it took three years. If I held up this gun and told them it was the only clue we ever found to who killed that creep, and then threw it in the river, they'd probably applaud."

I said nothing.

"Just wanted to straighten out a few things that may have been on your mind, George."

He was telling me that he knew I'd killed Brady. He was generally more blunt, but I suppose it was a question of ethics. If he didn't actually say the words, he wasn't violating his oath of office.

He gently pushed me toward my car. "Let's get moving. We're late for dinner and the kids always look forward to your stories

about the wild blue yonder." He chuckled. "Sam Junior spends a great deal of time watching clouds. Do you suppose that means something?"

The odor of burning leaves still lingered as we pulled out of the cemetery.

Memories. Layered like fallen leaves. Those buried deep recalled only when something like the sight of a rusted automatic brushed away the layers on top.

"Whatever happened to Dad's old .45, Donna?"

"Mother got rid of it. You know how she hated guns."

Memories, withered and almost dead.

Of my last visit to the hill where Sam and I had spent so much time. Donna had been with me.

"You mean this is where you and Sam used to hide your little treasures? That's very amusing, George, but let's leave. Monroe may seem very pretty from up here, but it's really an ugly little town."

Of the day I left Monroe.

"You left three hours before I did, Donna. What happened?"

"I had car trouble and had to pull off the turnpike."

And of the day I'd showed her Sam's letter.

"I should have killed him myself."

"You're too young. You know Dad always said not to touch a gun until you are twenty-one and mature enough to take full responsibility for your actions."

Happy Birthday, Donna.

When I get back, I'll send you a cake with twenty-one candles on it.

Even though it will be seventeen years late, it may help to know that I understand.

So would Dad and Roy.

The Ransom of Harry Elbow's Hand

by Su Fidler



Old Woody's wife caught what appeared to be Harry Elbow's other hand on a 4 lb. test line while fishing for trout off the stone retainer wall between the boat

ramp and the bait shack. She'd have been almost as surprised if it'd been a fish. She only came down to the river of an evening to rest her feet in the fresh air, and that particular evening she

Illustration by Joanna Roy

was sitting on the bench with the sun in her eyes trying to explain pacemakers to Mrs. Harley, who was thinking of having one put in Joe Harley, when she felt the tug on her line. Figuring it to be another old shoe, Old Woody's wife went right on quoting the microwave sign at 7-11 and reeled the thing in without even looking. So it was Mrs. Harley who screamed first.

The hand was pointing its swollen, trembling finger upriver when Old Woody's wife finally got it focused through the top of her bifocals. She let go a yip and flung the hand, rod and all, in the direction of the pinochle bench. Old Woody scrambled off the bench to save the rod from going over the ledge. Joe Harley nabbed the hand in his net. And Pop Torda peered at it from under his bushy white eyebrows, then gave three loud sucks on his pipe. By the time the new ranger got up from the bait shack to check on the screaming, it was over.

Joe Harley pulled the scabby, warty rubber monster hand out of the net and held it up by the thumb to drain.

"What do you think, Pop?" He winked at Pop. "You figure if we wrap it up in a hamburger box, the judge'll give us five hundred for it?"

Pop's eyebrows twitched and

he gave another suck on the pipe.

Mrs. Harley hurrumphed on her bench. Old Woody's wife whewed and put her feet back up. Joe Harley winked at Pop again and stuffed the hand into his bucket to take to Joe Junior's boy, who already had a rubber chicken nailed to his bed.

Old Woody shuffled the cards. Pop watched a duck paddle by.

"Will somebody please tell me," the ranger said finally, "who is Harry Elbow and why did Mrs. Woodrow think she'd caught his hand?"

Pop took the pipe from his teeth and peeped at the ranger through his eyebrows.

"Do you mean," Pop said, "you haven't met Harry Elbow yet?"

"No, I haven't, Mr. Torda."

"Down under the bridge beside the drinking fountain? Fellow dressed in flowered shorts and ankle-length fake fur coat? Stringy grey hair down to here?"

"No, sir, I haven't seen him."

"Carries a lawn chair around with him? A real nice double-weave Sears lawn chair with attached pillow?"

"You old fool," Mrs. Harley hollered across Old Woody's wife's head. "Can't you see we're trying to eat a ham sandwich over here? The ranger doesn't want to hear that old story anyhow."

Joe Harley winked.

Pop shrugged and picked up his cards.

The duck squawked.

"A double-weave plastic lawn chair?" the ranger said. He put his shiny new ranger shoe up on the stone retainer wall and leaned on his knee, grinning like he knew he was about to be hoodwinked.

"With attached pillow," Pop said. Pop nodded at Joe Harley. Joe Harley winked. Old Woody grinned and made himself comfortable on the wall. Pop nodded again and peeped at the ranger through his eyebrows.

"Seems like yesterday," he said, "but I figure it'll be more like three years come August since old Harry Elbow first showed up. But without the lawn chair, of course; the lawn chair came later. As I recall, it was the truants who first passed the word there was some skinny old bum making himself at home down under the bridge beside the drinking fountain, eating out of the garbage cans and poking around in the river for hidey holes. You remember, Joe Harley, those boys complaining how old Harry could drink up that wine quicker than they could hide it? Always left half, though, they said. Those boys all graduated last spring, one of them went to the Marines, they say. Well, sir, it wasn't but a couple of weeks

and we started seeing him up this way. I remember the first time I saw him walk straight up to that trash can there and sort it out. Aluminum cans in one pile, newspapers in another pile, for the collectors, you understand. Every time he came to a moldy french fry, he'd pop it into his mouth, close his eyes, and smile like it was a piece of dark chocolate fresh in the mail from his long-lost love. Wore a plaid suit in those days, Harry did. With no shirt and a pair of plastic thongs. And one day around mid-September he straightened what was left of the seams in that old suit and walked over here stinking to high heaven with his hair slicked back behind his big ears and offered me his hand.

"My name is Harry T. Elbow the Third," he said. "How do you do?"

"So I shook his hand and told him folks call me Pop Torda and offered him part of the bench. We sat there a while, him watching the mallards bob for shadows, and me thinking how, for a bum, Mr. Harry T. Elbow had real quiet hands. You'll notice how not many men these days seem at peace with their hands, and if you find one who does, he's either too honest to talk to or he's been bad so long the guilty fidget's been burned out of him. When out of the blue, Harry says, 'Mr. Torda, it

has come to my attention—'

"Even back then Harry had to slip his words out real quiet around that bad tooth.

"It has come to my attention,' he said, 'that the position of park bum is vacant.'

"Well, sir,' I said, 'I suppose it is.'

"I'm your man. I'm your man,' Harry said, and he shook my hand in both of his like I'd just offered him tenure at eighty thousand a year with full benefits. I never saw a man so pleased to accept his lot.

"You remember that, Old Woody? Well, sir, you can imagine the rumors that are going to fly around a man like that. The truants made him out to be a narc, of course. Old Ranger Asel, bless his soul, swore it was just a matter of time before he came across Harry's face on a missing persons notice from some ritzy loony bin out East. The salmon fishermen figured him for one of those that, when he died, it'd turn out he'd left half a million cash to a parakeet. Not that any one rumor wasn't half true, but the whole time there's Harry down under the bridge getting skinnier and smellier, but generally thriving, and more than willing to tell you his truth when you asked.

"Harry T. Elbow the Third, and proud of it,' he'd say.

"It was that tooth, you see.

Maybe we should've asked him to write it out, but when a man stands in front of you in mismatched galoshes eating a moldy Twinkie and telling you his name is Harry T. Elbow, you pretty much let him say it and go on about your business. Especially when he's chasing the Twinkie down with cheap wine out of a plastic Bugs Bunny baby bottle. Well, sir, to make a long story short—"

"Hah!" Old Woody's wife called over. The ranger grinned at her.

"Harold C. Alborough the Third. That's what Harry'd been saying all along," Pop said.

"You're getting ahead of yourself, Pop," Old Woody said.

"Am I?"

The ranger chuckled, shook his head, and reached for a handful of Old Woody's popcorn.

"As I was saying," Pop said. "Harry was generally thriving down there under the bridge. But even a life that suits a man to a T will start to wear on him after he reaches a certain age. Harry never complained, mind you, but you could see that, after a couple of winters huddled up under that concrete bridge, his back was starting to hurt him some. He was bending up out of the garbage cans a little slower and leaving the truants' wine bottles a might less than half full.

"So one day toward the end of May last spring, here comes Harry with his hair slicked back asking to use the phone behind the counter in the bait shack. Oscar told him to go ahead, and Harry tells the operator he wants to make a collect call to Mrs. Harold C. Alborough the Second at One Alborough Circle, Shaker Heights. Oscar said you could've knocked him over with a frog's feather when the lady came on the phone and Harry called her mommy.

"'Mommy?' Harry said, and asked after her rosebushes just like he'd been calling her every day at noon all along.

"The rosebushes, Harry's mommy said, were the same as they were when he left and what did he want? Then Harry asked after Old Grandfather out in the koi pond and his mommy said a fish was a fish and would Harry get to the point? So Harry said he'd be most appreciative if she would send somebody down to the bait shack with one of the spare reclining deck chairs from the attic of the pool house.

"'I have never in my life given a good deck chair to a bum and I don't intend to start now,' Harry's mommy said, and hung up.

"Harry stood there a minute, Oscar said, staring at the orange soda, and then he asked

to use the phone again.

"'Go right ahead,' Oscar said.

"Harry placed another collect call, asking to speak to Mr. Richard or Mr. Thomas Alborough of Alborough Bros., Inc., whichever one was available, and darned if the operator didn't put him right through.

"'Harry? Is that you, Harry?' said Richard or Thomas, Oscar couldn't tell which. 'Harry, why don't you just come home, everybody misses you, everybody's been worried sick, you know that, don't you, Harry? We'll get you the best doctor, you can have your old office back, Harry. Your name is still on the business stationery, do you realize that? We'll—'

"Harry put the phone down on the glass top of the counter and walked off, leaving Thomas or Richard's voice to fog up the lures.

"And Oscar didn't think any more about it till the next Thursday when here comes Harry wanting to use the phone again. He smells like a wino's grave, Oscar says, but he's got his hair all slicked back again and he seems to have gone to some trouble to pick the burrs out of his fur coat. He rummages down in this cracked two-gallon goldfish bowl he's got with him, takes out a bunch of old rags and a dented can of antiseptic spray, and finally finds a quarter stuck with a

wad of gum to the chipped blade of a Boy Scout hatchet he's got. Harry offers Oscar the quarter for the call. Oscar takes it. You spend as many years as Oscar has with your hands in a worm bucket, you begin to understand something about self-respect. So Harry calls himself a cab, then he carries his fishbowl out back behind the ladies' latrine.

"Here comes the cab.

"Here comes Harry out from behind the latrine. He's got his left hand wrapped up in the rags and he's looking a little pale, but in high spirits. He takes an old Styrofoam hamburger box out of the pocket of his fur and hands it to the cab driver along with a Hershey wrapper, and he tells him to deliver it to the Honorable Ms. Madeline Westerton Alborough-Belle up at the courthouse, who'll take care of the fare.

"Is he crazy?" the cab driver asks Oscar.

"Harry might be crazy,' Oscar tells him, 'but Harry doesn't have a boat laying on the bottom underneath the pumps which the ranger kept trying to put an abandoned sticker on; not to mention the overdue dock tab, like a certain driver.'

"So the cab driver drove on up toward the courthouse and Harry sat down on that rock over there to wait."

"You forgot the note, Pop," Old Woody said. "Tell what the Hershey wrapper said."

"Don't encourage the old poop," Mrs. Harley said.

"The note said," Pop said, "I am holding your brother Harry, whose little finger is enclosed, for ransom; said ransom being spare deck chair from the pool house; or \$9.95 cash, which sum shall buy a plastic chair from the Sears spring catalogue. Please reply via return taxi. Sincerely, Harry.'

"So Harry's sitting on that rock there. And an hour later here comes an ambulance with Harry's finger in a cooler, and a doctor wanting to stick it back on for him.

"No lawn chair?" Harry says.

"The doctor says nobody told him anything about a lawn chair, and asks the ambulance driver if he's sure they have the right address. Oscar says they do.

"Harry says, 'Why bother to reattach a finger of so little apparent worth, eh?' Then, Oscar said, he takes a hit off his Bugs Bunny bottle and ambles off toward the bridge with this weird little smile on his face.

"Well, sir, summer came and went, and it was a beautiful fall, as you'll recall, but it got cold early. First of October, the ground was already hard and that concrete bridge was collecting a chill. The truants

started complaining Harry was raiding their hidey holes so often it wasn't worth them skipping school. Joe Harley here had the idea of pulling his old army cot out of the attic and hauling it down to the bridge along with a stack of quilts. But Harry wouldn't hear of it. It wasn't the chill in the ground that was making him cold these days, he said.

"And sure enough, right before Halloween, here comes Harry with his hair slicked back again, except this time he was too drunk to find his quarter. Oscar told him he didn't care diddly-twit about the quarter but Harry couldn't use the phone if he meant to cut off his finger again. But like Oscar said, you got a man who you know to be honest and generally at peace with the world standing in front of you with a hatchet in a fishbowl and wearing a pair of pink fuzzy house slippers, how are you supposed to know what rules to apply to him? So Oscar lets him use the phone. Harry calls himself a taxi, then goes round back of the latrine."

"Pop! I'm warning you!" Mrs. Harley said.

"Leave out the gory part, will you, Pop?" Joe Harley said, "or else I won't get my supper."

"Except when the cab pulls up, Harry doesn't come out. Oscar and the cab driver go round

back of the latrine. And there's old Harry passed out in the weeds. He's holding a hatchet in his remaining attached hand and, in the fingers of the now-detached aforementioned gory part, a note addressed to the Honorable Ms. Madeline Westerton Alborough-Belle which read: 'Please advise whether enclosed hand is worth a deck chair.'

"Oscar called the ambulance, and we didn't see hide nor hair of Harry till the next spring. Day after Mother's Day, wasn't it? Harry comes walking down the hill from the bus stop sporting a shiny two-pronged hook where his hand used to be, a wad of crisp cash, and the new Sears catalogue.

"Turns out he'd spent the winter tied to the couch of the TV room of some fancy recuperation hospital out East. Come Mother's Day weekend, his doctor walked in and declared him dried out, rested up, and mentally competent. And his sister the judge said, 'What'll it be now, Harry? A lawn chair or a new name plate for the office door?'

"Harry said, 'A lawn chair, thanks.'

"The doctor said maybe there was some mistake. But the judge said, 'Or maybe not,' and handed Harry five hundred dollars cash. Which, as Harry said, wasn't a lawn chair, but it was as close

as Her Honor was likely to get to a fair and practical settlement, given her sensibilities.

"So here's Harry back at the river with his wad minus the eighty cents for the bus and the four dollars for the catalogue. Mrs. Harley there and Old Woody's wife helped him pick the orange and green double-weave plastic recliner with three positions and its own attached plastic head cushion out of the catalogue. Harry gave Joe Harley here the full price of thirty-nine ninety-five out of his wad, then bought a round of orange pop for everybody and left the change from the five hundred dollars on the counter in the bait shack. Oscar declared free soda till the wad ran out as long as nobody told the truants.

"Old Woody and Joe drove out to Sears in Old Woody's truck, bought the lawn chair fully assembled, and hauled it down to the bridge. Harry picked it up and put it down in half a dozen spots before he found just the right patch of weeds to set it in. Pickier than Mrs. Harley, Joe Harley said."

"Joe Harley!"

"And I never saw a more contented sight," Pop said, "than that first day when Harry T.

Elbow took off his hook and shoes, tossed his new teeth in the river, and stretched himself out under the bridge on that new lawn chair. Makes you wonder. Yes, sir, it sure does make you wonder."

"I'll tell you what it makes me wonder," the ranger said, grinning at the women. "What it makes me wonder is, how true is that story?"

Pop gave the ranger a look.

"True as it's going to get," he said finally.

Joe Harley winked at the ranger. The ranger winked back at him, chuckled, and checked his watch.

"Still, it does make you wonder," Pop said again as if he hadn't heard himself the first time. He shook his head, sighed, and reached down to haul in the bait chain that ran over the stone wall into the water. Joe Harley went cross-eyed winking at Pop, Old Woody, and the women all at once. The chain cleared the ledge. A six-pack of orange soda dangled from the end of it, caught in the clasp of a one-handed man's shiny two-pronged hook.

"Got time for a cold soda, ranger?" Pop said. "As I said before, it's free. More or less."

FICTION

Like Kin

by Brendan
DuBois



Illustration by Jim Ceribello

He was always one to sleep lightly and when the phone started screeching Sam Whelan was out of bed, slipping on his robe by the third ring. At his side his wife Terry murmured, "Whaz-zat?" and he softly reached out with a hand, stroking a bare shoulder. "It's all right," Sam whispered. "I'll get it." He padded out of their bedroom, past four-year-old Brian's room and downstairs. As he was going down the carpeted stairs he scratched at his back, wondering, is the phone really ringing?

In the kitchen the tile floor was cool against his feet, looking freshly painted in the cold moonlight. The phone screeched again, making one of those new computerized tones he hated.

"H'llo?" he said, weaving slightly. He was still only half awake. His eyes were crusty, as if they had been dusted with beach sand.

On the other end was the hiss of a long-distance line, static crackling and popping from some unimaginable electrical interference. Briefly he thought of far-off stars exploding, sending their radiation this way, disturbing delicate phone lines.

"Hello?" This time his voice was demanding. "Who is it?"

He was set to hang up and ramble back up to bed when the whistling started. At first it

seemed like another form of static or interference, but the whistling formed itself into a tune, a tune he had not heard for some time. He grasped the receiver tightly, holding his robe firm with his other hand, imagining he was being watched.

The whistling stopped. A man cleared his throat. He spoke.

"Sam," the voice whispered. "I'm comin' home."

Click. The line was disconnected.

Sam replaced the receiver, his hand shaking. He leaned against the kitchen wall for support, looking at the familiar surroundings. The refrigerator in one corner, which dispensed ice cubes and water. The multi-featured microwave oven, with green numerals that blinked at him and said it was two in the morning. The mini color TV set and the dishwasher and garbage disposal, and the side door that led to the garage, and his and her BMWs.

He rubbed his hands along his arms, feeling the goosebumps that were there. Before going back upstairs he made sure every door and window was locked, and when he went back into the kitchen for a glass of water, he disconnected the phone. A wrong number, he tried to think. Just a wrong number. The water tasted flat and metallic, and he put the

glass in the sink. It made a ringing noise. For no reason he lifted the glass up again and dropped it from a little higher up. He did that three times until it finally smashed, and the sudden noise made him jump. He put the broken pieces of glass in the garbage disposal, washed his hands, and slowly went back upstairs.

He went back into bed, sliding underneath the warm and slightly moist covers. Terry snuggled over to him, resting her head on his chest. He found the weight oppressive.

"What was it?" she sleepily asked.

"Wrong number."

"Hmmm." She rearranged herself and some hair tickled his nose. He didn't move.

"You were down there long enough."

He had an urge to scream at her so what if I was! He gritted his teeth and said, "I was just up. That's all."

"Oh," his wife murmured.

At work the next day Sam Whelan had pretty much forgotten the previous night. He owned and operated Whelan Security, and for a very long time it had been a shoestring affair, run out of his old house in the crummy part of Devon. Terry had answered the phone and Sam and

two retired cops had provided the security. Most of the time it was hanging around fast-food restaurants down at Tyler Beach, chasing off drunks or rowdy kids. Then one spring a computer firm had moved into the area and they needed security, bad. Sam was the only firm within twenty miles, and he went out on a limb, a very long limb, to get their business.

Some limb. He remembered the long days, scraping up every piece of credit and money he could, buying up uniforms, running ads and practically raiding the high schools, looking for people to become guards. If it had gone bust, Sam would have ended back with the two old cops, with thirty uniforms in cardboard boxes, and with every bank and collection agency outside the door, howling and chewing on the shrubbery. But it hadn't gone bust.

He went through the weekend reports from his guards. Nothing major. Nope, no busts. Not only did they still have the computer firm, they also had two malls, a factory, and a chain of outlet shops from Maine to Massachusetts.

His office door opened and Marcie came in. She was in her early twenties and wore a bright yellow dress, highlighting her tan.

"Phone call for you, Mr. Whe-

lan," she said. "Line two."

"Thanks." She walked out and he watched her with a critical eye. Not bad but young, damn it, too young. Terry was ten years older than Sam's secretary, but she still had a smile that made his blood warm. On his phone the second line was blinking. He popped the button in and raised the receiver.

"Sam Whelan," he said, easing back into his chair, looking out the floor-to-ceiling windows that looked over the downtown, open brick-mall look of Devon. A good view. Damn it, he deserved a view like that, after those long winters—there never seemed to have been summers—when he and Terry ran Whelan Security from that crummy house.

The whistling started.

He sat up in his chair, his back rifle-straight. He recognized the tune all right. An Irish tune. And another thing. There was no long-distance hiss on the phone line. He slammed down the receiver and buzzed the intercom.

Marcie came back in and Sam said, "You've been with us how long?"

She had been smiling but the look faltered, and she tightened her grip on a yellow legal pad. "Two years."

"Two years," he said thoughtfully. "Two years ago I told you

one thing, one simple rule. Each and every time I get a phone call, you get the name of who's calling, right?"

"Mr. Whelan, I—"

"Right? Each and every time. I don't got time to waste with idiots on the phone and right there, that phone call cost me time. And time is money in this business. You think you can remember that?"

Marcie's face was red and she avoided looking at him. "I'll remember."

"Good. You don't, I'll get someone in here who will."

When she left, slamming the door behind her, Sam rested his head on both hands, rubbing his fingers against his skin. You're going bald, you got little round sausages of fat over your kidneys, and you just insulted the best damn secretary a guy could want. Security guards, just hire them and give them uniforms, and a week later they're ready. Simple. But to get someone in here who could run a computer, keep track of invoices and pay the bills and answer the phones, well, that was harder to find. And what do we do with someone when we find her? We insult the crap out of her. Marvelous.

He looked at the pictures on his desk. Three of Terry, one of Brian—taken a day after he was born—and one of him and

Terry, arms around each other, at the beach in Maine where they spent their honeymoon. They had been to other beaches later in their lives, especially after the business took off, but he always smiled at the memory of the rocky coast and cool nights in that wooden cottage. No hot water, and no electricity. Some honeymoon.

In the bottom desk drawer was a holstered .38 revolver. Under the revolver were some old legal files and on the bottom was a framed black and white photograph. The photo was creased and stained and showed two young boys standing in front of a blueberry bush. A very young Sam Whelan was on the left, arm flung over the shoulders of the older boy standing next to him. The older boy was standing straight, arms at his sides. Their hair was cut impossibly short. The young Sam was smiling. The other boy wasn't. He held the photograph in his hands and remembered other things.

He was nine. Or maybe ten. It was hard to remember everything, but some things remained fresh. Sam ran along the side of the road. Ahead was his older brother Derek, and the guys. The guys were a nameless bunch, all about De-

rek's age, and they smoked cigarettes and rolled the packs up in their T-shirt sleeves and swore a lot. They were ambling ahead, walking fast, and Sam called out, "Hey, Derek! C'mon, wait up."

It was summer. There was nothing to do at home. Mom made you dust or wash dishes, and Dad always had yard work to do. Derek and the guys were out, doing something secret, doing something special. Maybe take in a matinee at the Ioka and eat popcorn and throw things at the screen, or go to the sand pits and break beer bottles with rocks. Sam kept on running, his chest burning with the effort, wanting to be a little bit faster, wanting to be with Derek and the guys.

Derek shook his head and smiled at his friends. There were three of them. One was smoking and the other two had cigarettes tucked behind their ears.

One guy said, "That's your little brother, ain't it?"

"Yeah," Derek said. "He's queer, you know."

Sam slid to a stop. "I am not."

Derek laughed. "Man, you are so queer. Go on. Beat it, will you?"

Another guy picked up the chorus, yeah, beat it, go away queerbait. One grabbed a rock and threw it and other stones

started to come at him, and the chorus, queerbait, queerbait, queerbait, and a rock struck Sam, right above the eye. Sam turned and ran back home, holding onto his eye and crying, blood trickling through his fingers. He wasn't crying because of the cut, though it hurt a lot. He was crying because his older brother had been right there with the other guys, throwing rocks and chanting, a happy smile on his face.

The third phone call came after dinner that night, right after Brian had been put to sleep, dressed in his Star Trek pajamas and cuddling a stuffed bunny he insisted on calling Laura. He and Terry were on the living room couch, Terry with an ice-cold margarita in her hand.

When the phone rang Sam put down a newspaper and got up, touching Terry on her knee. "It's okay," he said, trying to keep his voice calm. "I'll get it." In the kitchen he took a quick glance at a wall mirror and saw the dull white scar just above his right eyebrow. The shrill tone rang out again and it disturbed him so, like fingernails being run down a blackboard. He took a deep breath.

"Yes?"

No hissing. No crackling. No whistling.

"Surprised?" the man on the other end said.

He sagged a bit, holding out a hand on the paneled wall. "Yes, I suppose I am. Where are you?"

"Around. Thing is, I know where you are."

Sam rubbed at his face and looked away from the living room. Terry had been sitting there safe, drink in hand, engrossed in whatever was on the television.

"I thought, well . . . A parole and all . . ."

The man laughed, but it was not a laugh from humor. "Oh, so they say, so they say. You know the time runs on so you can't even tell what month it is sometimes. You just know it drags. And for me, well, I was in Indiana. You ever hear of Indiana? Damn, I know I didn't until those troopers rolled up. Life plus twenty. Hard to believe. Time gets going so after a while you just gotta get out. And you don't worry none about parole papers or such. You just go. Anything in your way, you go through, over or around, it don't matter none."

Sam closed his eyes, not wanting to see the kitchen with all the fine accessories, his wife sitting calmly out in the decorated living room, or even his hand gripping the phone.

"How long you been out?"

"Hard to say. Some days it seems like a few hours, other times, it's like I never went in. But the nights, man, the nights, that's when the stone and the bars come back. Always at night."

Sam whispered, "Damn it, what do you want?"

The man chuckled. "Anything and everything. I'll be in touch."

It seemed to take a long time to hang up the phone. From the kitchen he went back to the living room, standing behind the Scandinavian-design couch. Terry was at his elbow.

"Who was on the phone?" she asked. On the television, a large white dog was attacking a man. The dog's teeth looked very sharp and the man's screams were an odd, tinny sound.

"Nobody special."

Terry turned her head up at him, a frown suddenly there. "Well, it had to be somebody. Even if they weren't special."

She turned back and he was thankful for that because he had quickly clenched both hands into fists. He put them behind his back, for he was ashamed of them. He had an incredible urge to strike out and tear at something, and she was the closest something about. Sam felt something tugging within him and he had quick fear that he had been infected with some

awful thing. He dug his fingernails into his palms.

"Like I said," he murmured. "Nobody special."

Some years before that a young Sam Whelan, the scar fresh and bright over his eye, lay in bed, listening to the rustling sound from outside. His parents were away visiting Grandpa and Grandma down Maine, and Derek was supposed to be home, taking care of him. But he wasn't. And something awful had happened.

Sam pulled the blankets tighter about him, listening to the sound of a person climbing up onto the porch. The screen window screeched up and Derek tumbled in. He muttered a curse and stood up. There was a thick odor of beer in the room.

Sam called out: "You in trouble?"

From the darkness: "Why do you care?"

"Two cops came by. In their cruiser. Looking for you."

Derek swore. "What did you say?"

"I told 'em you went and got ice cream for me."

His brother laughed, switching on an overhead light by his bed. "That's a good one." He had a smirk on his face and there were fresh scratches on his cheek, as if he had run into a

thorn bush. Or something else. He dug out a cigarette pack and lit one up, the sharp tobacco odor making Sam's nose twitch.

"You listen here," Derek said, pointing the burning cigarette at him. "Anybody else ask, even parents, I've been here all night." He grinned and took a drag off the cigarette. "'Cept the time I got you ice cream."

Derek shifted on the bed, his greasy engineer boots making dirty furrows on the blankets. He reached down between the bed and the wall and came up with a men's magazine, the type with naked women on the cover. He flipped through the pages, a sly grin coming to his face now and then. Sam watched him, hands on his covers, not moving.

His brother started whistling. Sam asked, "What's that you whistling?"

Derek looked up from the magazine. "Hunh? Some tune Mackey taught me. Irish, he said, called Garry Owen. Only thing I could remember, one of the lines says, 'Better times than these, Garry Owen. Better times than these.' That's a good friggin' motto. Always be a better time."

He flipped through some more pages. "Close your eyes and get to sleep 'fore I stick this cigarette on your forehead."

Sam did as he was told, turn-

ing over to face the wall. He closed his eyes but he did not sleep. He was always afraid to sleep with Derek in the same room. And he always heard a whispering voice inside him, urging Sam to leap out of bed and attack Derek.

For most of the day Sam kept his office door shut, not even bothering to look at the folders within his IN basket. Instead he kept the bottom desk drawer open, and for some reason he propped up the old photo against the holstered revolver. He spent the morning with a pile of paper clips in the center of his desk. He leaned back in the chair and slowly went through the pile, bending and twisting the metal clips until they broke in his fingers. He would throw the pieces away and start over again.

He expected another call. He wasn't disappointed.

"Fifty," the man demanded. "Fifty by the end of the week. We'll say Saturday night."

Sam took a pen in hand and started doodling on a legal pad. "Fifty what?"

"Your brain going? Fifty thousand. In cash. And that's just for starters."

The pen flew across the room, striking the wall and gouging the paneling. "You're crazy," he hissed, intent on keeping his

voice low. "And what the hell do you mean, just for starters?"

"Just what I said. Just for starters. Hey, you want to talk crazy here, listen to this—you got two options. Pay me or don't. And you don't, that's fine, 'cause I can still have some fun. I went by your house today. Fine woman you married. You should tell her not to sunbathe out in the back yard—too many guys can spot her. Unless you don't care. Then you wouldn't mind me sharing some of that wealth—after all, I didn't go to the wedding. She looks like a fine piece."

Sam could not think of a thing to say. His throat felt like it had been stuffed with wool.

"Or if that don't do the trick, well, there's other things. I also did some reading in the library today. You've done okay for yourself. Nice business, home, belong to the right clubs. How'd you like me to go to your country club some weekend, introduce myself to your bankers and friends? I'm sure you could get me in. Or I could pop in on some of your best customers. How does that sound?"

"I could call the cops," he finally said.

"You could, but would you? Would you want my picture on the front page of your local rag? My smiling face, your name dragged into it? And people

around town saying, wow, if this guy's like that, then what must Sam *really* be like. Not to mention, I get up there again, guaranteed I'll get out. And the second time I won't be so polite as to call first. I'll just come barreling in."

Sam closed his eyes and slowly re-opened them. The room, with its paneling and community awards neatly framed on the far wall, seemed slightly out of focus, like he had only been there for a few seconds. He blinked his eyes and reached into the desk drawer, pulling out another pen.

"Fifty thousand," he said, his voice flat. "You know, I don't have that kind of cash just lying around. It'll take some work, I have to go to my bankers—"

"Tough," the man interrupted. "I really feel sorry for you, man, really sorry. I feel so sorry that if you're not in your office by noon on Saturday, with the cash, I'll go visit your missus, find out if you got money problems or something. I'm sure she'd enjoy it."

When he was done Sam thought, Well, let's throw another pen at the goddam wall, but he tried to keep his cool. He looked down at his neat handwriting, the numerals in black ink on the yellow paper. Fifty thousand dollars. Unbelievable. He underlined the number

with his pen, and underlined it again, and again, until he was slashing at the paper with the pen, making deep, black gashes on the pad.

He stood silently for a moment in the room after the body had been taken away. In a way he supposed he was searching for one final scent of her, but all that was there was the strong odor of disinfectant. With his mother gone from where she had been so many months, the hospital bed seemed to have shrunk. Sam stood there for some minutes, hands clasped behind him, eyes stinging with salty tears. Out beyond the doorway nurses and doctors bustled about and the intercom squawked messages, but he kept his eyes on the bed. Dad had been dead for almost five years and now he was alone. He had outlived his parents, something that had scared him at five or six when he had huddled under his blankets, listening to a thunderstorm outside pound and rage. The thought had scared him when he was little.

It was still scaring him now.

He looked for Derek in the hallway, in the men's room, and at the nurses' station. He finally found him in the waiting room, at the far end of the ward. Derek was slouched in a chair,

dirty jean-clad legs stretched out on the scuffed blue tile, reading an automotive magazine. On the table before him dozens of magazines were flung about, their covers torn and greasy. Derek looked up and tossed his magazine back into the pile.

"God, I'm glad that's over with," he said, zipping up his jacket. "Months and months, damn, you never knew when it was going to happen."

Sam bit his lip. "Hell of a consoling thought."

"Hey, c'mon, we knew for a long time what was going to happen. It was just a matter of time." Derek stood up, brushing back his hair with one hand. "Something there, hunh, what Mom said just before she went?"

Sam shoved his hands into his ski jacket's pockets. "I can see why. Obviously, you won't be able to look out after me."

"Yeah, I can see. So when do I start?"

The light in the room seemed stronger, hurting his eyes. "Start what?"

"When do I start working for your company? Man, I really need a job something bad, let me tell you. My motorcycle's about two weeks away from being repossessed."

In the ski jacket's pockets were bits of lint. He started rolling them into little balls.

"There's no way on God's earth you're working for me, Derek. None. You may be my brother and Mom might have said for me to look out for you, but there's no job. I can't hire you to guard somebody else's property."

Derek's eyes were small and tight. "Some way of looking out for your brother."

"Only thing you and I have in common is our last name. I work for a living, and I manage to do it without a record."

Derek rocked back and forth a bit on his heels. "Maybe you're right. Hey, if I'm lucky, the old lady left me some insurance money. If my bike goes—"

Sam closed his eyes and swung out at Derek, and in a confused number of seconds he was on the floor, on his back, with his head in the grip of Derek's arms. Derek grunted and moved his arms, and the bolt of pain made Sam whimper.

"So good, so high and mighty," Derek said in a fierce whisper. "Younger brother thinks he's so goody-goody but you're not, are you? Deep down, we're both alike. You see something, you take it. You don't like somebody, you punch 'em out. Only difference is, I do it and you just think it, don't you? That makes you any better? 'Cause someday you'll slip, little one, some day you'll slip. And we'll both

be in the gutter together."

At the office on Saturday he looked down at the open attaché case on his desk. Nestled in it was the money, tightly bound in paper wrappers. It had not been a good week. He and Terry had been sniping at each other for days—actually, he had done most of the sniping. Complaining about dinner, about the way she drove, her clothing bills, until last night she had said, "When you decide to rejoin the human race, then I'll rejoin you," and with that she had taken two blankets and had gone to sleep on the couch.

The banks had given him a hard time, too, raising their collective eyebrows, sighing and wondering where the money was going. And yesterday — Friday—his secretary Marcie had given her two weeks' notice. He stared down at the money, rubbing his temples with both hands. And damn, his head hurt. It felt as if the skin around his skull was shrinking tighter and tighter, like a plastic wrap over a salad bowl. This shouldn't be happening to me, he thought. I'm a good person. Honest I am. I work hard, pay my taxes, take care of my wife and son, and this should not be happening.

He picked up the phone before the second ring.

"You set?" the voice asked.

"I got the money."

"Good. Remember the sand pit we used to play at? Be there at ten tonight. Alone. And remember what I said: you got two options. Pay or don't pay. It's your choice."

"Listen, I—"

The man hung up.

Sam held the phone in his hand for a long moment, and depressed the receiving hook and dialed a number. After three rings Terry picked it up.

"Where are you?" she asked. Her voice was cool. He had not liked the look she had given him that morning, after her night on the couch.

"I'm at work, I, uh, I got some things to do tonight. Business. I'll be home late."

"How late?"

"About eleven, maybe later."

In the silence the faint static was deafening.

Sam cleared his throat. "Can I ask you something?"

"Ask away."

He looked out the window, remembering a time when he had once enjoyed the view of downtown Devon.

"It's just this," he said. "Am I a good person, Terry?"

He could hear her breathing. "Of course, Sam. What kind of question is that?"

"So I am a good person?" he said, pressing her.

"Yes, yes, you're a wonderful person." She paused, and the ice tone in her voice melted away. "What's wrong?"

He let out a long, shuddering breath. "Oh, damn, I can't tell you. Not right now. Maybe later. Maybe a long time later."

After he got off the phone he sat at his chair, letting his fingers glide across the bundles of bills. So much money. Better take it out, count it, just to be sure. He reached down and opened the bottom drawer, pulling out the revolver. Carrying all that money, you might need protection, he thought. He slowly started to remove the bills from the attaché case.

A cool night in Maine, a married man only four days, Sam sat on the cottage porch swing, watching a thunderstorm approach from over the gray Atlantic. Terry was next to him, sharing a blanket over their legs. The calendar said it was August but the weather insisted on being October. The blue-black bank of clouds was reaching up to the sky, and Sam admired the way the lightning burst through the clouds, flaring them up like a flashbulb. After each burst of lightning, it took long seconds for the low rumble of thunder to reach them.

"Tell me something?" Terry asked, one hand on his arm.

"Sure. What do you want?"

"Your brother. Derek. Tell me about him."

Sam said carefully, "Well, what do you want to know?"

She smiled. "Anything. You're so secretive about him. He wasn't at the wedding—you just said he couldn't attend, that he was in some sort of trouble."

The Atlantic hissed and boomed against the rocky beach below the cottage, and Sam tapped his fingers against the wooden armrest of the swing.

"When I was growing up," Sam said, "I collected airplane models. I must've spent hours making them. One day Derek got mad at me for squealing on him, and he smashed all of them. I can still see him standing there, the broken plastic pieces at his feet. He got into a lot of trouble for that, but for him, I think it was worth it."

"And for that, he didn't come to the wedding?"

He tapped his fingers again on the armrest. "I tell you, I don't want you coming up to me later, saying, 'Gee, hon. You shouldn't have told me.'"

"Oh, come on," Terry said, laughing. "How bad can it be?"

"I won't bore you with the other scraps, the reform school. Let's just say Derek has always been the bad one."

"Sam," she said, running her hand up his arm. "He's your brother, your own flesh and blood."

Sam said, "Three years ago my flesh and blood was in Indiana. He was working for a drug dealer out of Chicago. One night, I think it was winter, Derek and another man went to work. A man by the name of Duncan had just cheated the boss out of a deal. The boss told my brother and the other man what to do. They did it. And as they came out of the house, some troopers were waiting for them. Someone had heard the screaming. Inside the house they found Duncan, his wife, his eleven-year-old daughter and nine-year-old son. They were all dead. Two had been shot. Two hadn't. Derek got life plus twenty. That's my flesh and blood."

Terry was silent. Sam said, "When I do think of him, I'm just glad he's there and away. No more broken airplanes."

Out over the ocean the lighting flared again. "My God," Terry whispered. "How horrible."

Yes, he thought. Quite so. And that's just the beginning. When I heard the news reports and followed the trial, I could see how it happened. I could see Derek swaggering into the house, gun in one hand, knife

in the other, smiling all the time the blood was being ripped out and spilled. That was Derek. That's the way he was and always will be. And God, the dreams, sometimes I dream I'm there, there in the house with Derek, and I'm holding something cold, sharp, and sticky in my hand. And I'm smiling, too.

"Yes, horrible," he said.

His headache was much worse. Even the low throb of the BMW's engine seemed to pound at him like a sledgehammer to the base of his skull. The road was dirt and rough—twice he had scraped bottom—but he was at the sand pit. The cool green numbers on the dash clock said it was nine fifty-nine. He stepped outside, a tan raincoat on, a lumpy weight in one pocket. Sam stood by the door and decided to leave the parking lights on. The amber light sent out a soft, yellow glow.

Resting against the fender of the car, he tried not to think of anything but what was going on right there. The cool feeling of the metal under his hand. The chirping of crickets over on the other side of the pit, and the wind rustling a piece of cardboard across the gravel.

And whistling. Someone whistling, better times than these, Garry Owen.

"Derek?" he called out.

"The same. Where is it?"

"In the trunk."

"Get it."

The trunk lid popped up with no problem and there was the attaché case, resting against a shovel. He lifted the case up and turned, leaving the lid open. The trunk light lit up a small area around the car.

"Here it is," he said.

From the shadows he saw someone move, and his brother slowly walked into the light. Derek smiled, and Sam's first thought was, Jesus, look at his teeth. Blackened and rotten. His long hair was stringy and he had a thin, sallow look about him. Too long behind concrete, he thought. Derek wore a long leather jacket and jeans, and the clothes seemed two sizes too large.

"Hello, little brother," Derek said.

"Hello yourself."

Derek nodded to the car. "Not bad. Payments must be something, though, hunh? After all, you could never afford airfare out to Indiana."

Sam said, "The cost wasn't the problem. The destination was."

"Fine," Derek said. He reached out and Sam handed the case over to him. On Derek's hand a spider had been tattooed on the pale skin.

He hefted it a few times. "Hard to believe there's fifty in here, you know? And it's hard to believe my little brother's done so well. This is going to help. A lot."

Sam put his hands in his coat. "You said something about a first installment."

Again the grin, again the rotten teeth. "Yep. Mom told you, just before she croaked, for you to take care of me. Promises are still promises, ain't they? So here's another promise—I get through this set, I'll be back for more. Or maybe I'll ask your wife for the second installment."

Sam scuffed the dirt with his shoe. "I've never been able, even on my best days, to understand what makes you tick."

"You do, that's what. You and I are kin, bro, and you're more like me than you'll care to admit."

He tried to think but the pounding at the base of his skull almost made him wince. "Open the case, why don't you."

Derek chuckled and flipped open the two locks. His eyes narrowed and he turned the case over, and a bunch of legal pads tumbled out, falling to the ground like pieces of wood.

"Is there a point to this?" Derek asked.

"Yep. You said I had two options, big brother. But you forgot a third one."

With that, he pulled out his revolver and shot him.

He put the shovel back into the trunk, the blade crusted with moist sand. It had been hard work and his hands ached, but by God it was over. No more phone calls, night visits, or demands. Or even airplanes. It was over, buried in the sand. He slammed the trunk lid in satisfaction, thinking, I had to do this. I had no choice. I am still a good person. And he tried to forget what looked like a smile on Derek's face, just as he started shoveling the dirt in.

After he started the BMW he found his headache was gone. He had never felt so much alive, and he looked forward to going home and having a long bath and a drink with Terry, and hell, on Monday, he'd give Marcie a raise and plead with her to stay. It would all work out.

He felt so good he started to whistle, and he was halfway down the dirt road before he realized what tune he was whistling.

UNSOLVED

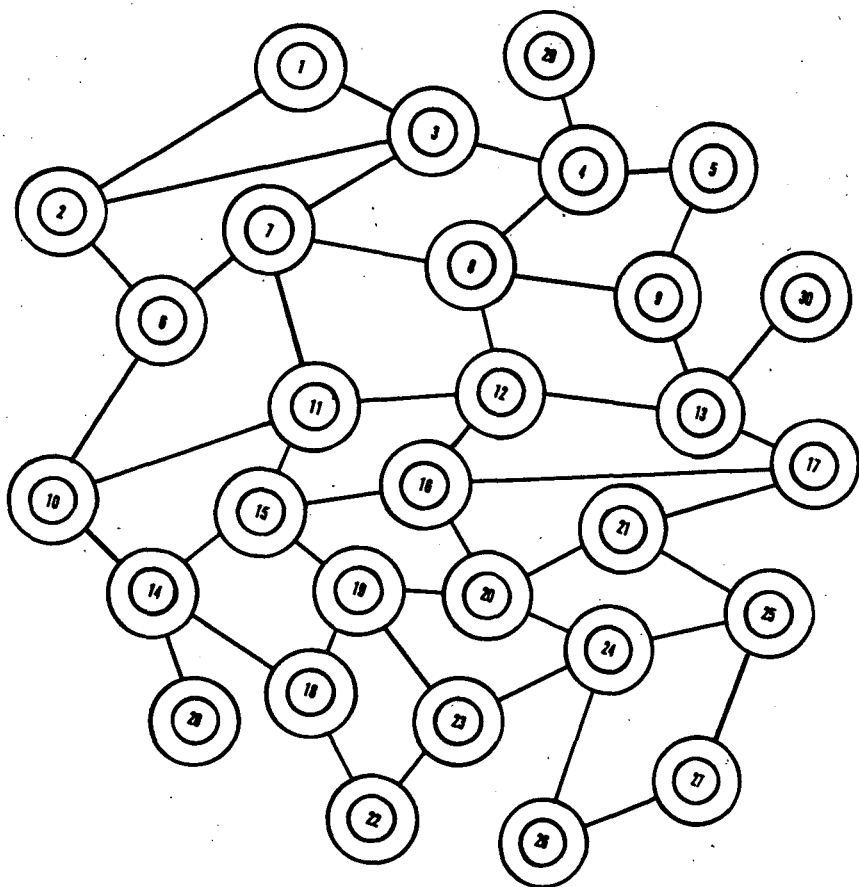
Unsolved at present, that is, but can you work it out?

The answer will appear in the January issue.

Aye, lads, there is a monstrous problem to be solved, for there be a Thing, we know not what, which prowls the Glen at night. Now, the villagers are gathering at the ruins of Carfax Abbey tonight, and from this point they will enter the Glen and seek out this devil. Will they find and capture it? Could you lead them to success where so many have failed in the past? Let us make a game of it and see if you can triumph over the forces of darkness. Using the game board on page 55, place a black checker on position 12; this will represent the monster. Place a red checker on position 26; this is the starting point for the villagers at Carfax Abbey. The numbered positions on the board are the intersections of the many paths that run through the forest. The game is won when the red checker can be moved to the same position the black checker occupies. The game always begins by moving the red checker first. The play then alternates between the black and the red. Each move consists of moving a checker from one position to an adjacent position along one of the paths that join them together. At first it will appear that if the black side is careful in its choice of moves, it can always stay one position ahead of the pursuing red forces and thus cause a stalemate. Fortunately this need not be the case, for there is a way that the red forces can always be sure of scoring a victory over the black. It is this secret that you must fathom before the Glen can be returned to the peace and tranquility it enjoyed in the past.

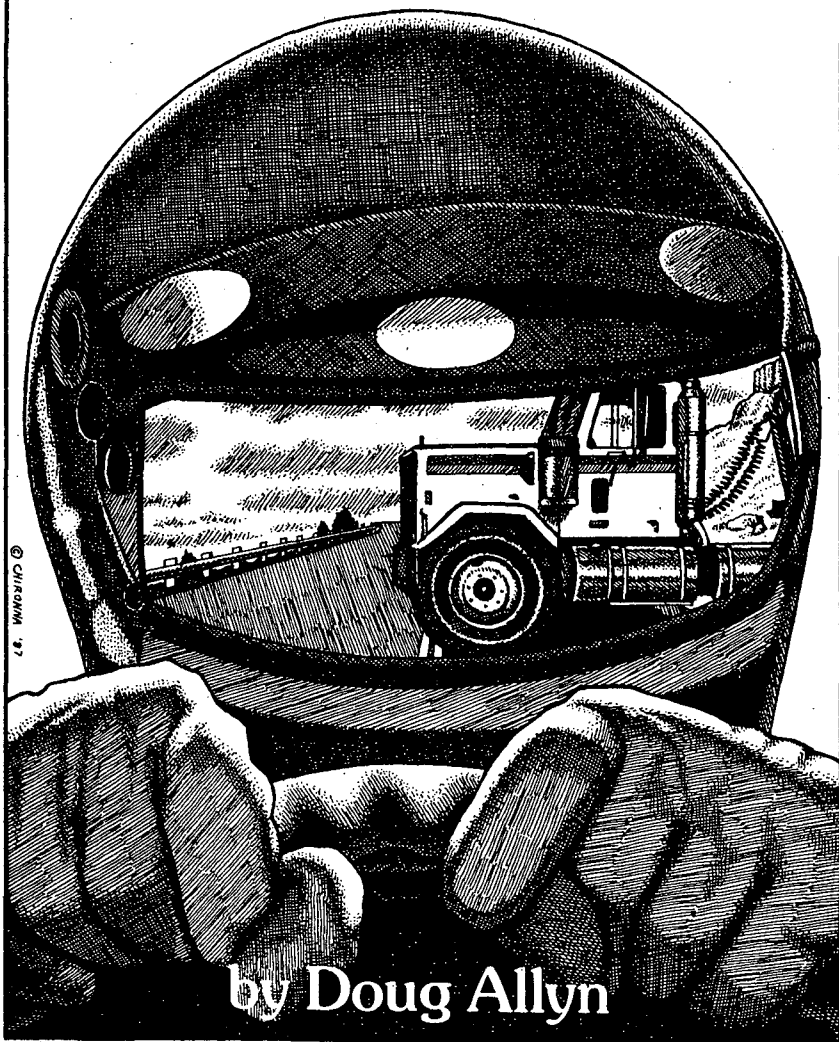
See page 146 for the solution to the December puzzle.

"A Monstrous Problem," taken from Merlin's Puzzle Pastimes, edited by Charles Barry Townsend. Copyright © 1986 by Charles Barry Townsend. Dover Publications, Inc., New York, N.Y.



FICTION

SuperSport



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by Doug Allyn

Illustration by Ronald Chironna

Chris cranked the leather-covered wheel hard left, skidding the Morgan into the turn at sixty-plus. He eased off the gas pedal for a split-second, powershifted into fourth, and then mashed it again. The carburetors whistled, sucking air, and the car responded with a surge of power that jammed his shoulders back into the seat as he gunned it through the curve. Sunlight was glinting off the mountain face, dancing across his windshield, and the rhythm of the road hummed through him like a heartbeat.

For an instant Maraschal's Alfa Romeo flashed into view in the corner of the rear view mirror, at least a quarter-mile behind. Good. But Buchek's roadster had disappeared around the curve ahead and Chris slammed the wheel with his palm in frustration. Second place. Unless he really poured it on.

He kept the pedal floored longer than necessary through the next curve, pushing the car to the limit, punishing it for being too slow to win. The course was tricky, a fourteen mile sprint up Mount Lemmon to Windy Point, but he was beyond caring about risk. He was running on the edge, fueled by anger and exhilaration, his spirit fused with the low-slung

roadster, snaking through the blind curves, pedal to the metal, half man, half machine. Blind to the beauty of the mountain beside him and the desert below, he was totally focused on the road and the tachometer. A few seconds. Buchek couldn't be more than a few seconds ahead.

He caught a glimpse of something yellow as he powerslid into the third curve in the series. A warning flickered in the back of his mind but he ignored it, invincible now, invulnerable. He downshifted into third, the engine howled in protest and the tires screamed, barely clinging to the asphalt as he stormed out of the curve. And saw the huge auto-hauler rolling slowly backward across both lanes of the road ahead.

Instinctively he cramped the wheel hard over, trying to squeeze past the truck on the right, but the car bucked when it hit the narrow shoulder. It skidded broadside into the steel guard rail and went shrieking along the barrier, grinding itself to pieces in a white-hot river of sparks. A rear wheel hooked on a guard post, snapped off, and suddenly the Morgan went airborne, plunging over the railing into space, cart-wheeling on the highway, two hundred feet below.

There was a moment's hush, broken only by the rattle of peb-

bles raining down the mountainside onto the pavement around the wreck. And then there was a shout, and then another, and the sound of footsteps as spectators and judges sprinted toward the accident. But Chris didn't hear them. Dazed, and broken, he was still struggling feebly with his safety harness when gasoline from the smashed carbs trickled onto the exhaust headers. The fuel ignited with a gentle *whuff*, enveloping the shattered roadster in an intense, ochre shroud of flame that sent a twisted ribbon of ebon smoke coiling lazily upward into the steel blue Arizona morning.

"no . . ."

Five hundred miles away, in a darkened hotel room, Andy McMahon lurched suddenly upright in bed. Groggy, barely awake, he groped for the telephone, listened numbly to the dial tone for a moment, then fumbled the receiver back on its cradle and switched on the bedside lamp. His battered travel alarm clock read eleven forty-five. The glow rimming the room-darkening shades told him it was nearly noon, and after a moment he remembered where he was. Los Angeles. He'd flown into LAX late the night before and taken a room at the Marriott.

He massaged his eyes with his blunt fingertips, then buried his beefy face in his palms, trying to recall the subconscious signal that had dragged him up from the depths of the darkness.

Nothing. He couldn't remember a thing about it. Still, a feeling of foreboding seemed to linger in the room, skulking like a jackal just beyond the halo of light from the bedside lamp.

He slid the blankets back, levered his bulk out of bed, and padded silently to the door. He stood there a while, listening, a pallid, pudgy giant in baggy white boxer shorts. He cautiously released the lock, opened the door a crack, and peered out into the hall.

An elderly Oriental couple with matching leather trenchcoats and maroon cowboy hats were chattering with a uniformed bellman as they checked into a room a few doors down, but otherwise the corridor was deserted.

McMahon eased the door closed, leaned his back against it, and took a deep breath. A dream. That's all it was. He brushed his thinning sandy hair back with his fingers, still not entirely awake. Only a dream. But a bad one. Its dark tendrils were still roiling and twisting at the edge of his memory like

oily smoke. A warning? He tried to shrug it off. But in the end he lumbered back to the nightstand, and picked up the phone.

The Stone Street squad room of the Tucson City Police Department was sunlit and deserted, a warehouse for sleeping typewriters and empty desks, wrapped in Sunday morning silence. The office door at the far end of the room opened as McMahon walked in, and Lieutenant Art Gomez glanced out. Their eyes met in a wordless exchange, and then Gomez grinned.

"Andy Mac," he said, "I'll be goddamned."

"No doubt," McMahon nodded, "you got a minute, Art?"

"Sure, sure," Gomez said, waving him in, "come in, lemme buy ya some coffee." McMahon followed him into the tiny cubicle where Gomez spent most of his working hours. The room was a shambles, files stacked in every corner, nondescript sportcoats dangling from hooks on the door, Styrofoam coffee cups everywhere. It was a decorator's nightmare, but it suited Gomez. He was mid-fortyish, rumpled and round-shouldered, with coarse dark hair worn unfashionably long, and a melancholy man-in-the-moon face. He looked exhausted, and one

cheek was reddened, as though he'd been sleeping at his desk.

McMahon was wearing a polyester navy blazer over gray slacks, plain white shirt, no tie. His large, amiable face was a bit flushed, as though he'd tipped a beer or two too many the night before, but he looked presentable otherwise, an over-the-hill jock, a stranger you might sit next to in a bar if you felt like talking.

The orange plastic office chair squeaked a protest as he eased down on it. Gomez passed him a Styrofoam cup of black coffee, and McMahon sipped it cautiously, wincing at the bitterness.

"So what brings you back to sunny Tucson, Andy? Business or pleasure?"

"Definitely business," McMahon said, "a murder."

"Yeah?" Gomez said, his smile fading. "Anybody I know?"

"Chris Wilde, the writer. I understand it's your case."

"It's ours," Gomez said cautiously, "what there is of it. It only happened yesterday. But I don't get it. Why's the DEA interested? Is there a narcotics angle I should know about?"

"The DEA's not interested, Art. I am. It's strictly personal."

"No kidding?" Gomez grinned. "You into the gay scene now, Andy? You coulda fooled me, I never—"

"He was my brother, Art," McMahon interrupted coldly, cutting him off. "Wilde was a penname he started using back in college, in honor of Oscar Wilde, I guess. Had it changed legally as soon as he was old enough. But his name was Chris McMahon once. And he was my brother."

"*Madre de Dios*," Gomez swallowed, "I'm sorry, Andy. I had no idea—"

"It's not your fault. We ah, didn't exactly brag up our relationship. Hell, I haven't seen him in years, but—anyway, I want to know what went down, Art. All my mother could tell me was that Chris was killed in a race at Mount Lemmon. And that it apparently wasn't an accident."

"No," Gomez said, "it wasn't."

"What happened?"

"There were support vehicles parked in the cutouts along the road up the mountain. One of 'em was a truck, an auto-hauler. Somebody broke into the cab and released the emergency brake, just as Wilde's car was rounding the turn. The truck rolled into his path. And he—" Gomez swallowed. "His car went over the guard rail, Andy. Down the mountain."

McMahon looked away. "God," he said softly. Gomez said nothing. McMahon rose slowly out of his chair and refilled his cup

from the grubby coffeemaker in the corner. "Did ah, did the car burn?" he asked quietly.

"There was a fire," Gomez said, "but the medical examiner said Wilde was probably unconscious when it happened."

"Thank God for that at least," McMahon said, staring down into the dark brew. "How did the killer get down off the mountain? There's only one road."

"We don't know for sure. Dirt bike, maybe. Some of the spectators were running around on 'em. And there was a lot of confusion after the crash. Woulda been easy to disappear in the crowd. Have you got any candidates, Andy? Any idea who mighta done this?"

"Sure," McMahon shrugged, "about half my relatives, every Joe Sixpack in Arizona who figures gays ought to be shot on sight. Chris got national media attention because of his newspaper so you can probably add a few million more bigots to the list. How's that for openers?"

"It's a start," Gomez sighed, "but I was kind of hoping for something more specific."

"Chris told me once he'd been getting death threats since he founded the paper back in '78, a dozen or so a week, and that every time he did a talk show about gay rights his hate mail

doubled. He never took any of it seriously. Maybe he should have. Victor will know more about the threats than I do. Like I said, I haven't seen much of Chris lately."

"Victor Lasky, you mean? The guy who got burned?"

"What do you mean, burned?"

"At the mountain. He tried to—pull your brother out of the car. Got burned pretty badly, third degree on his arms and chest."

"Sweet Jesus," McMahon said softly.

"This Victor, was he your brother's . . . boyfriend?"

"Boyfriend, lover, whatever. They've been together since college. I always thought—never mind. Where is he?"

"Tucson Medical Center, he—hold on, Andy. Where're you going?"

"To see him. He'll know about any death threats, and—"

"Andy, I'm sorry," Gomez said gently, "I can't let you do that. There's no way this is a DEA case. You've got no jurisdiction here."

"Hell, I've got no jurisdiction anyplace, Art. I quit the narcs almost two years ago. I'm retired now."

"Retired?" Gomez said, openly skeptical. "You? What happened?"

"I got shot at in Panama and passed over for promotion in

the same week, and it occurred to me it was time to pack it in. I was burned out, Art, sick of standing there like the Dutch kid with his finger in the dike while the dopers sailed by in their yachts. Counting service time, I had my twenty-five in, so I took an early out. At three-quarter pay and full bennies. The wonders of civil service, Art. You oughta try it."

"And now you're doing what? Fishing?"

"Nope, I work out of Detroit tracing witnesses for a couple of law firms. Everybody's suing everybody these days. Business is good and I'm good at it. I can help, Art."

"No, you can't. Look, your brother was a national figure, maybe the preeminent spokesman for gay rights in the Southwest. By tomorrow I'll need a bulldozer to get past the reporters in the lobby. I can't cut you in. You know department policy on involving private citizens in an open investigation."

"Actually I don't," McMahon said mildly. "What I do know is that a few years back I busted some gunrunners down in Nogales, and ah, one of 'em got away from me. He was just a kid, and losing him made me look bad. Real bad. Maybe it even cost me a promotion. By the way, how's your nephew, Art? Still in law school, is he?"

Gomez stared at him, his dark eyes unreadable. McMahon took a sudden interest in his coffee cup.

"Damn," Gomez said, shaking his head slowly, "I must be gettin' old. When you walked in here I was actually glad to see you, Andy. I really was."

"Come on, Art, you know I wouldn't ask you to do anything that'd jam you up, but you owe me one, and I'm calling it in."

"What do you want, McMahon?"

"To give you a little help, that's all."

"All right," Gomez nodded, "I'll tell you what. Other'n the preliminary work out at the mountain, nobody's been assigned to this yet, and won't be until tomorrow. So you've got today, Andy, or what's left of it, but that's all. And that's the best I can do."

"Then I guess I'd better get started," McMahon said, crumpling his coffee cup and tossing it in the general direction of the wastebasket.

"Not quite yet," Gomez said. "Just so we understand each other, McMahon, one, if you get anything, you forgodsake turn it over to me. And two, if anything comes unglued, we never had this conversation."

"What conversation?"

"Yeah," Gomez sighed, "right."

"Hello, Victor," Andy said quietly.

The man in the hospital bed swiveled his head slowly toward the sound of McMahon's voice. His large, myopic eyes were watery, clouded with pain. His forearms and hands were wrapped in strips of greasy yellow gauze, and his forehead was bandaged. The normally tangled mass of his semi-Afro was scorched to the scalp in several places, and spiky with salve. His slender, patrician face was a raw, angry red, spotted with smears of white medication.

"Andrew," he said at last, "it's been a long time. I'm surprised you came. Or were you just in the neighborhood?"

"No, actually I'm here on official business, Victor," McMahon said, sliding into the white plastic chair beside the bed. "We want the person who did this to Chris. And to you."

"Do you really? Why? To give him a medal?"

"Look, I know how you must feel—"

"No, you don't. You have no idea how I feel, Andrew. Or how Chris felt either, about anything important. And I doubt very much that you care, even now."

"Victor, he was my brother."

"No, he wasn't. Not in any

real sense. You were never there for him, Andrew, and your absence spoke louder than words. Chris had many brothers and sisters in the gay rights movement. But you were only a relative, and a distant one at that."

McMahon flushed, swallowing a retort. He rose and crossed slowly to the room's only window and stood there a while, arms folded, staring sightlessly down at the steady stream of Sunday afternoon traffic below. "Maybe you're right," he said at last, "maybe we weren't as close as we could have been, I don't know. Things . . . happened. Chris had his crusade, I had my work. And our schedules never seemed to be in sync. And we . . . lost touch, I guess. But it wasn't intentional, Victor, at least on my part. We were close as kids. Maybe we would have been again. I . . . thought we had time. I thought we had all the time in the world."

"Maybe you did have. Once. It's a moot point now, isn't it?"

"Yes," McMahon said, turning to face him, "I suppose it is. Look, I know you're hurting, Victor. Well, so am I, so let's keep this brief. Are you willing to help me?"

"I don't—yes, of course I am. If I can."

"All right, what can you tell me about these races?"

"The races? Not much. It was just a hobby, really. Chris enjoyed driving and the press coverage was good for the cause."

"What about prize money?"

"There isn't any, only some ghastly trophies, and occasional expense money. Small change. Nothing worth, ah," he swallowed, "nothing worth killing someone for, if that's what you're thinking."

"Maybe not, but whoever did this chose to do it in a race, maybe hoping it'd pass for an accident, maybe for some whacked-out reason of his own. Either way, I'm going to focus on the race. I don't have the time or resources to look anywhere else. Did Chris have any enemies involved in racing?"

"Too many to count. They're all over-the-hill macho types playing out their little fantasies in antique cars. Most of them hated the idea of a gay driver being the big winner. It upset their sense of propriety."

"I can see where it might, but can you narrow it down a bit, Victor? I need a place to start."

"Maybe you could begin with the VRVC board. They tried to force him out, you know."

"What's the VV—whatever?"

"VRVC. The Vintage Racing Vehicle Conference. It's the governing body that arranges the meets, sets standards, that sort of thing."

"And you say they tried to force him out? How?"

"I'm not really clear on the details, but after Chris won the championship last year, the board changed some of the rules, something about equipment, to disqualify his Morgan from further competition. It didn't work, though. He just borrowed another car and kept right on winning."

"You mean he wasn't driving his own car yesterday?"

"No, he was driving the other one, a red Morgan SuperSport."

"I don't understand," Andy said, frowning. "If both cars were Morgans, why was one eligible if the other wasn't?"

"I don't know. I don't know anything about cars. I doubt it matters."

"Where did he get this other car?"

"From a member of the movement. Chris did a humorous piece in the paper about what the board was trying to do. A gentleman from Dallas, a Mr. Avery Radmore, read it and called to offer him the use of the red SuperSport. Gratis."

"Quite a gesture," Andy observed.

"Yes, I suppose it was."

"All right, the board tried to force him out, and failed. Were any of them angry enough about it to arrange the—accident?"

"I . . . don't know. I doubt it."

"What about the other driv-

ers? How did they feel about Chris?"

"I think they all resented him, but some more than others. At the banquet after the Mid-Ohio meet, a driver named Buchek made some remarks about Chris's driving and—other things. They had words, Buchek suggested they step outside, and Chris obliged him. Buchek left in an ambulance. He was a stubborn man," Victor said, smiling grimly at the memory, "he wouldn't stay down. He didn't appear to hold a grudge about it afterward, but who knows?"

"Do you know Buchek's first name? Where he's from?"

"Chuck Buchek, probably Charles. From Phoenix. He was in the race yesterday."

"I'll check him out. Who else?"

"Last February, after Chris won the meet in Nassau, a driver named Maraschal accused him of—I don't know, unsportsmanlike conduct or something. Anyway, he challenged Chris to a runoff, just the two of them, for a side bet of twenty thousand dollars."

"Twenty—? What happened?"

"Chris won and Maraschal paid off."

"I thought the paper was running on a shoestring. Where did Chris find twenty thousand to put up? And how could you two afford to get to the Bahamas in the first place?"

"The trip to Nassau was free. The Bahamian government picked up the tab for shipping the cars and expenses for the week. And Chris didn't put up the money for the bet either. He ah, he bet the SuperSport."

"He bet a car he didn't own?"

"At the time no one knew it wasn't his, although it's become common knowledge since. I'm sure Maraschal's heard about it. But then I suppose he couldn't complain even if he wanted to. Code of the *caballero* and all that macho nonsense."

"*Caballero?*" Andy echoed, frowning thoughtfully. "Is this Maraschal a Mexican national? Gerardo Maraschal? Ciudad Juarez?"

"Gerardo. Yes, I think that's the name. Do you know him?"

"I know of him," he said, "if it's the same man."

"He and Buchek are the only two with whom Chris had any real trouble. For the most part we were just ignored. And not very politely. And that's really all I can tell you."

"I want to know more about the business end of things, Victor, and about that rules change. Who can I talk to?"

"I... suppose Colonel Galmont would be your best bet. He's a member of the board, and one of the ones who pushed for the change. He has an estate in the Catalina foothills, or rather his wife does. He married one

of the Mandeville Industries heirs. Probably for love."

"Why for love?"

"I've met her," Victor said, with a wan smile. "If he married the woman for her money, she couldn't possibly have enough."

"I'll tell them you send your best," Andy said, managing an answering smile. "Do you know how long you'll be in here?"

"A few days, they tell me. Why?"

"I ah, I thought you might like to attend the funeral. I can pick you up if you like."

Victor glanced up at him a moment, then looked away again. "I don't think so," he said. "I don't imagine it would please your family if I came. The movement will undoubtedly hold a separate memorial service for Chris. I'll feel more comfortable there. But... thank you for offering."

"*De nada,*" McMahon said. "Is there anything you need?"

Victor's numbed gaze wandered around the small, anonymous room, as though his future was written on its sterile walls. And perhaps it was. "No," he said quietly, "nothing, thanks."

The Galmonts lived in isolated splendor north of the Patano Wash near the very private Tucson Country Club. The gateposts were hammered bronze, and

the long driveway was cobblestone, but McMahon didn't really get an impression of multiple millions until he parked his dusty beige rental Ford in front of the house and realized that most of the home was underground, built into the side of a carefully groomed foothill. The building's front façade was smoked glass a story and a half high, a broad dark mirror that reflected the empty desert beyond. He pressed the doorbell but the only sound was the dry October wind whining down from the Santa Catalinas.

A stocky Mexican woman in a frilly black and white maid's uniform answered the bell.

"I'm Sergeant McMahon," Andy said, flashing his honorary DEA shield at her. "Is Colonel Galmont in, please?"

The woman didn't respond. She stood blocking the half-open doorway like Horatio at the bridge. "*Policía,*" Andy repeated, "*Coronel Galmont, por favor.*"

The woman shrugged and stepped aside. The long, open living room was cool and pleasantly dim after the heat of the afternoon. The furniture was Spanish style, dark exquisitely carved wood with subtly patterned upholstery in turquoise and black.

A tall, whipcord thin gentleman in a powder-blue short-

sleeved jumpsuit unfolded himself from an easy chair, tossing his *Wall Street Journal* aside. His steel gray hair was worn short, as close to his skull as a helmet. He had striking, ice blue eyes set in a seamed hawk's face, with deep creases guarding a narrow mouth. "*Gracias, Marinda,*" he said, dismissing the maid with a nod. "I'm Jack Galmont, sergeant. What can I do for you?"

"I understand you were at Mount Lemmon yesterday, at the race?"

"I was one of the course judges, yes, but I was up near Windy Point. I told the officers at the scene I didn't see anything, if that's why you've come."

"Actually, colonel, what I need is some background on the race itself. I was told you were the man to talk to."

"About racing?" he said cautiously. "Well, I suppose—forgive me, I'm forgetting my manners. You look like a man who likes a drink now and then, sergeant; will you join me?"

"You're a good judge of character," Andy sighed. "Anything wet'll do fine."

He followed Galmont across the stadium-sized room to a massively carved bar of black walnut. Real walnut. Galmont stepped behind the bar, came up with two clear bottles of Corona Cerveza, and filled a

pair of pilsener glasses.

"All of the servants but Marinda are in Acapulco with my wife," he said, as though pouring his own beer required an explanation. "Let's see, the racing. To tell you the truth I hadn't thought about it. I don't know much about police work, of course, but I doubt that Chris Wilde's death had anything to do with vintage vehicle racing. More likely it was over some homo spat."

"He was killed during a race," Andy pointed out, easing onto a horsehide barstool.

"Well, yes," Galmont conceded, resting his elbows on the bar, "but—look, I don't mean to tell you your business, sergeant, I'll help in any way I can. What do you want to know?"

"For openers, why don't you think his death is connected with racing?"

"Because there's nothing serious about it," Galmont said. "There's no prize money, no real prestige. Most of the people involved are twice as old as their cars. It's a gentleman's sport, nothing more."

"Some people seem to take it pretty seriously. I've already heard stories about fistfights and rules changes and heavy betting. Sounds a little more exciting than collecting stamps."

Galmont stared at him in frank appraisal for a moment,

then nodded. "You've been doing your homework," he said.

"We try," Andy said. "Can you tell me a little about the sport? For instance, what are the rules?"

"They're simple enough. The races are either endurance runs on Grand Prix courses, or sprints on closed sections of highway like the one yesterday. The cars must be at least twenty years old and in stock condition. There are different classes, of course, determined by engine displacement, one litre, two litre, et cetera. That's basically it."

"I was told there was a rules change a while back, supposedly to force Wilde out."

"Sad but true," Galmont nodded, smiling ruefully. "You've got to understand that the people who founded this sport in our area are—mossbacks, old money looking for new games to play. The first races were on private estates, by invitation only. Things expanded, and eventually anyone with a vintage racer was allowed in. Then, two seasons ago, the commission found that most of the races and all of the press coverage was going to the—rather flamboyant editor of the *Wilde Weekly*. This was not the kind of publicity we wanted, so we decided to try to disqualify him."

"We?"

"I'm a member of the rules

committee, sergeant. I'm not ashamed of it, or proud of it either, considering how things turned out."

"What happened?"

"How much do you know about cars, sergeant?"

"I change my own plugs, that's about it."

"Then I'd better give you a little background. Originally the rules allowed the cars to be modified, souped up if you will, as long as the parts used were available for purchase at the time the car was built. Wilde owned a British roadster, a '64 Morgan, that he'd modified with Weber carburetors, an oil cooler, that sort of thing. He was an excellent mechanic and a better driver, and in that car he was almost unbeatable. So we changed the rules to 'factory stock condition' only, no modifications allowed. Without the extra equipment, his car would have been a marginal performer, and we hoped he'd quit."

"But he didn't."

"No. He carped and whined in that damned paper of his and then showed up at the next race with a Morgan SuperSport."

"I don't understand. What was the difference?"

"The SuperSports were limited production models designed specifically for racing, and were sold with Weber carbs, et cetera, as standard equip-

ment. The car was perfectly legal under the new rules. And Wilde was still unbeatable. Or at least he was until Chuck Buchek came up with a '65 SS of his own. It's been touch and go between them ever since."

"I understand they got into a scuffle a few months ago."

"After Buchek blew his engine in the Mid-Ohio," Galmont nodded, sipping his beer. "Buchek's a bit of a hothead. I'd ah, rather not comment on the scuffle. Didn't actually see it."

"Fair enough," Andy said. "Who would have benefited most from the rules change if Chr—, if Wilde had dropped out?"

"Buchek. And Maraschal. And I would have as well. I was a consistent winner before Wilde began racing, though I've been less active recently."

"Nobody likes losing," Andy observed.

Galmont glanced at him sharply, his eyes narrowing. "You're right," he said evenly, "no one does. And I was a Marine for twenty-five years, in Vietnam, and in Beirut, so I know all about lost causes. But just for the record, sergeant, racing had lost its appeal for me anyway. I'd already won all there was to win, and when you're on top, the only place you can go is down again. So I quit a winner. And it was the best move I ever made."

"Really?" Andy said, with just a hint of skepticism in his tone.

"Yes, really," Galmont echoed, irritated. He tossed off the last of his beer with a gulp. "Come on, I'll show you something you might find interesting."

Andy followed Galmont down a narrow stairway that ended at a padded, soundproofed door. The colonel opened it, and they stepped into another world.

The huge subterranean room was nearly as large as the house above it, carpeted throughout and filled with automobiles, magnificent racing machines of every size, color, and description. Each of them was a vision of raw power barely restrained, sleek, gleaming steel and aluminum animals with black rubber hooves. Andy could almost hear them snarling in the silent room.

"I'm—impressed, colonel," he said honestly. "I've never seen anything quite like this."

"It's not a large collection," Galmont said, pleased at the awe in McMahon's tone, "only thirty or so, not nearly as large as Harrah's, or even Brant's. But I have some really fine examples here, a '23 12/50 Alvis, a Hispano Suiza Type 68 bis, a Talbot 105. In racing, you're only a winner until the next race. In collecting, a victory can last a lifetime."

"A victory?"

"You don't build a collection like this without fighting for it, sergeant, and the competition for a rare piece can be brutal. Did you ever serve in the military?"

"Army," McMahon said, "four years in the MP's."

"Then you know the feeling of being a pawn. I endured it for most of my adult life, but no more. The difference between racing and collecting is the difference between being a chess-piece and a chess player. Or in being a sergeant," he added slyly, "instead of an officer."

McMahon didn't rise to the bait. Galmont seemed a bit aggressive for a man discussing a hobby, but then it was a very expensive hobby.

"What about Morgans, colonel, do you have any in your collection?"

"Only one at the moment, and I'm afraid it's not ready for viewing now. It's in the drying vault." Galmont indicated a garage door at one end of the showroom with a smaller door adjacent to it. "The car's just been painted, and aluminum can be a bear to dry properly. Have to keep the humidity constant."

"It's not important," Andy said. "You do your own restoration work here, then?"

"Most of it, yes. I have two

licensed mechanics on staff, as well as a paint and body man. They work in a garage area on the far side of the building. I do most of my work in the office there in the corner, chained to a computer. I have complete files on most of the collectible cars in the world, who has them, and where, and their current market value."

"The car Chris Wilde was driving," Andy said, consulting his notepad, "the 1962 Morgan SS. Was it valuable?"

"I suppose that depends on your definition of valuable. The market value of ah—a '62 Morgan SuperSport could vary anywhere from ten to thirty thousand dollars, depending on condition."

"Thirty grand? Could it have been insured for that much?"

"Probably," Galmont said. "Do you think this may be an insurance thing? That perhaps Radmore overinsured the car, then lent it to Wilde hoping he'd crack it up? And maybe got a bit impatient?"

"I suppose it's possible," Andy said. "Do you know Radmore?"

"Not well," Galmont said, "but what I do know I don't like. We've gone head to head a few times over auto deals, and he can be one ruthless sonofabitch. And he's gay, of course. They're everywhere, you know, the gays. They're in government, in

church, even in the military."

"You sound as though that bothers you," Andy observed.

"I'm not crazy about the idea," Galmont shrugged, "but I've learned not to worry about what I can't change. Was there anything else, sergeant? I really should—"

"Just one last question. Do you know a driver named Maraschal?"

"I know him," Galmont nodded. "He owns several Alfa Romeos. Excellent racing machines for their time."

"I was told he had trouble with Wilde in Nassau. Over a bet?"

Galmont shook his head slowly, smiling. "Do you know who Maraschal is, sergeant?"

"I—know of him," Andy admitted.

"Then you know he's reputed to be a heavy hitter in the cocaine trade, and you'll understand why I'd rather not comment on that particular incident."

"I'm surprised a man who soldiered for twenty-five years would be intimidated so easily."

"Nice try," Galmont grinned, "but no sale. If you're interested, you can ask Maraschal yourself. He's staying at the San Miguel, on Miracle Mile. And he's easy to find. He always takes the whole seventh

floor. He's superstitious, they say, but then most gamblers are."

"So I've heard," Andy said. "Maybe I'd better get over there before he gets a hunch it's time to move on. Thank you for the tour, colonel, and for your help."

"My pleasure," Galmont said, offering his hand. "I wish you luck. Just one thing, though, sergeant, take a little advice from an old soldier. Don't knock yourself out on this thing."

"No? Why not?"

"You draw the same wages either way, right? And nobody really cares about one queen more or less."

"Don't they?" Andy said.

The elevator hummed to a halt on the seventh floor of the Hotel San Miguel, the doors shushed open, and McMahon found himself staring into the muzzles of a pair of 9mm automatics. A heavysset Latin in a rumpled blue suit was facing him in a combat crouch, feet spread, his weapon gripped firmly with both hands. A second, younger man, wearing a khaki safari outfit, was slightly behind Bluesuit, backing him up. Both men looked professional, and very nervous. McMahon raised his hands slowly, to show he was unarmed. "*Policía*," he said.

Bluesuit approached cau-

tiously, shifted his weapon to his left hand, and patted Andy down. He found his .38 and slid it into his pocket. He also found the badge. He frowned at it, grunted, then tossed it back at him. McMahon made no move to catch it. The second man looked entirely too jumpy and his weapon was cocked.

"Okay," Bluesuit said, "what you want?"

"*Policía*," McMahon said, kneeling to retrieve his badge. "*yo soy—*"

"Speak English," Bluesuit growled, "I unnerstand."

"Good for you," Andy said, straightening, "because after I finish talking to your boss, you and I are gonna have a nice chat downtown about *pistolas y maneras*."

"I'm afraid not, *señor*. Luis has diplomatic immunity, you see." A sleek, silver-maned Latin wearing an immaculate pearl gray pinstriped suit stepped into the hallway from the suite beyond. "Our embassy was good enough to send him over after the—accident yesterday. I apologize for his manners. I am Gerardo Maraschal. My man has seen your credentials, so perhaps you should see mine." He handed McMahon an embossed leather I.D. folder. "You'll note that I too have a diplomatic passport."

"Very convenient," Mc-

Mahon said, glancing at it and passing it back.

"I find it so," Maraschal said. "Your American legal system is incomprehensible, even to yourselves, and I prefer to avoid . . . misunderstandings. You're here about the killing on the mountain?"

"That's right. Why all the paranoia? What are you afraid of?"

"The killing was done well. Professional perhaps. I don't think such skill would have been wasted on Wilde. I was following him closely in the race, and barely avoided a crash myself."

"And you think maybe someone made a mistake?"

"It's possible," Maraschal nodded. "My '59 Alfa does not closely resemble Wilde's '61 SS, but both cars are red, and to an untrained eye . . ."

"Possible," Andy said, "but unlikely. As you said, the hit was well done. Professional. And forgive me for being blunt, Señor Maraschal, but of the people involved, you are the only one with—" he nodded toward the two gunmen "—credentials as a—professional. And I've been told you had difficulty with the victim over a bet, in Nassau. Twenty thousand, I think the figure was, against a car he didn't own."

"And you think I might have

killed him?" he said, smiling with thinly veiled contempt, "at the risk of my own life? Over twenty thousand dollars?"

"Maybe not because of the money so much," Andy said, "but perhaps because the car wasn't his to wager."

"What you imply might be valid if he'd lost and failed to pay off. But he did not lose. He won fairly, and I paid the bet. And I will tell you something else, sergeant. When I learned the car didn't belong to him, I wasn't angry. I was amused. Chris Wilde was not an ignorant man. He knew my—reputation, and took the wager anyway. Not many men would take such a risk. I felt contempt for him before, because of what he was, but afterward—" He shrugged. "He may have been homosexual, but he was no coward. I had no quarrel with him."

"Twenty grand might be considered cause for a quarrel."

"To some people, perhaps," Maraschal said indifferently, "it is not an important sum to me. And if I had wished to—arrange such a thing, I would not have done it here. There are races in Nassau and Mexico City. Wilde could just as easily have died there, and I would not have been—troubled by the local *policía*. And now, if you will excuse me, *sergeant*, I have other business. Jaime

and Luis will see you out. Your weapon will be returned to you in the lobby with, of course, my sincere apologies."

"You can keep your apologies, *señor*. But I'd appreciate your 'professional' opinion on who might've set this up."

"As I said, I question that Wilde was the target, but if he was . . ." Maraschal paused, his brow creased in thought, one craftsman considering the work of another, "if he was, then it was done with style. A lover perhaps? An old enemy? *Quién sabe?* Who knows? But if it had happened in the *corrida*, the matador would have been awarded the ears. Good day, *señor*."

McMahon took his time on the run up to Phoenix. He set the cruise control on the rental Ford and loafed along at fifty-five, trying to digest what he'd learned and to make sense of it. But he was tired, and it had been a mistake to trap himself for so long behind the wheel. As the setting sun waned and flickered behind the jumbled peaks of the Maricopas, sinister images seemed to dance in the desert just beyond his headlights, a chaotic shadow show of surreal childhood memories, gleaming racing machines, and a roiling column of smoke from

a half-remembered dream.

He rolled down his window, but the rush of desert air didn't blow away the cobwebs, so he floored the gas pedal, hoping a surge of adrenaline would accomplish what the windblast couldn't.

The rental Ford whined in protest, swaying as he crested a hill at eighty, but there was no real sensation of speed. Nothing like what Chris would have experienced in his open roadster. And it occurred to Andy that he'd never seen Chris race. Not once. He'd always meant to, but . . . now he never would. He'd failed Chris, and now that failure was forever. There was nothing he could do to change it, or to make amends. Nothing. Ahead of him, U.S. 10 stretched on into the night, narrow, and bleak, and empty.

Buchek's neighborhood was a surprise. Vintage racing was supposed to be a rich man's game, but there was nothing upscale about the enclave of crackbox tract houses near the Salt River Reservation. They looked like they'd been built by their owners out of scrap lumber, one room at a time. Buchek's place was a ramshackle gray split-level ranch with peeling paint, identical to its neighbors except for the large galvanized-metal pole barn that occupied

most of the back yard.

It was after ten when McMahon cruised past. Buchek's house was dark, but there were lights on in the barn so Andy eased his rental Ford into the driveway and parked beside a battered blue pickup truck with an auto trailer attached.

He could feel the pulse of the bass as soon as he stepped out of the car, country music, white man's blues, resonating through the steel walls of the pole barn. He crunched up the gravel driveway toward Waylon Jennings' voice. "A Rose in Paradise."

He didn't bother to knock. No one could've heard it anyway. The barn's interior was as crude as its shell, unpainted concrete floor, naked fluorescent tubes dangling on dogchains from metal girders overhead, scarred perf-board paneling riveted to the walls. Grease-monkey chic. There was space enough for several cars, but only two were in residence, a mid-sixties yellow Corvette minus its engine, and a gunmetal gray Morgan roadster.

The Morgan's front end was balanced on a jack post two feet above the floor, with a pair of stumpy, overall-clad legs protruding from beneath it. A grimy, simian paw was fumbling around on the cement for a wrench just out of reach. Andy slapped the tool into the

palm, it disappeared under the car for a moment, then Buchek rolled out from beneath the Morgan on a mechanic's creeper.

He was a squat grizzly of a man in grubby gray coveralls, with a stubbled, square face and hard gray eyes topped by a greasy engineer's cap. Andy flashed his DEA badge and Buchek accepted it without question.

"Just a sec, lemme turn off the radio."

He crossed to the workbench against the wall and punched a button on a jury-rigged car stereo, choking off Waylon in mid-groan. Andy's ears rang in the sudden silence.

"You want coffee?" Buchek asked, pouring a cup from an oil spattered Mr. Coffee on the bench. McMahon nodded and accepted a chipped china mug with a graphite fingerprint pattern. Black, bitter coffee, strong enough to float a bolt.

"Clutch linkage is screwed up," Buchek said, nodding toward the roadster. "Mogs are a bitch to keep slick. You here about Wilde wipin' out?"

"That's right. You left in kind of a hurry afterward, didn't you?"

"I gotta punch in at eight tomorrow, wreck or no wreck, mister. Some people work for a livin'."

"Isn't vintage racing kind of

an expensive hobby for a working man?"

"Maybe," Buchek said, scowling down at his cup, "but it's the only one I got. Got no wife any more and I keep racin' as much for my boys as for me. Helpin' with the cars keeps 'em busy, 'n outta trouble. Look, I can't tell you no more'n I already told them guys yesterday. I seen the auto-hauler there when I took the curve, but I had my hands full tryna hang onto the lead and I really didn't pay no attention to it. If anybody was around it I never seen 'em. 'Fraid you made a trip for nothin'."

"Maybe not," Andy said. "I understand you had trouble with Chris Wilde after the Mid-Ohio run."

"Some," Buchek nodded. "I tried to take him on a outside curve and he run me off the track. Driveshaft jammed and I lunched my engine. I was really torqued, so I got in his face about it at the banquet after the race. Funny, I never figured he'd fight, I mean, the guy's a fag, right? Only we go outside and he cleans my clock for me. Drilled me so hard they hadda haul me off in a ambulance for Chrissake. Concussion. Bad day all around."

"Found it a little tough to live with, did you?"

"I ah, took some static from my boys about it," Buchek said

cautiously, eyeing McMahon over the rim of his coffee cup. "Nothin' I couldn't handle. 'Sides, it wasn't just the principle of the thing, it was the money. Blowin' that mill prob'ly cost me ten grand."

"That seems like a lot of money for an engine."

"It wasn't just any engine. The one I blew was the original motor. All the numbers matched."

"I don't understand."

"Every car's got a serial number stamped on the engine and the frame and like that, to identify it. If the numbers match, it means the car's in original condition, which makes it worth a lot more to a collector. The Morgan factory still builds cars by hand, so any Mog's rare, but the SuperSports are the rarest. They didn't make very many of 'em, and since most of 'em were raced, only a few are still in original condition. My '64 SS wasn't as rare as Chris's '61, but it was worth at least twenny, twenny-five grand till I blew the original engine. Now? Who knows, twelve, fifteen tops."

"So having a car in original shape is really important?"

"It is to a collector. They're fanatics about stuff like that. They count the spokes in the wheels, the rivets in the hood-scoop, that kinda crap, but it's all important 'cause it determines how valuable the car is.

It's a big deal with them to outdo each other. Big ego trip to own the rarest. I always figured that's why Radmore loaned Chris the '61."

"You're the second person who called it a '61," Andy said, frowning, "but according to the title it was a '62."

"Nah, it was *titled* as a '62 'cause that's when it was imported, but it was actually built in '61. Any car freak could tell ya that, the body styles're different. That was the point."

"What point? I'm not following you."

"The '61's are the rarest SuperSports of all. It was the first year they built 'em, and they only made a dozen or so all told. There can't be more'n three or four left in original condition. So when Radmore loaned Chris that car, he not only helped out a buddy, he really stuck the needle into Galmont at the same time. Like he was saying, 'See, my collection's so hot I can afford to risk one of the rarest cars ever built.' And it worked, too. Galmont quit drivin' rather than lose to Chris for another season, which he woulda done, since he didn't own a SuperSport at the time. He's bought a couple since, but he never raced 'em, which is fine by me. The guy was a maniac on the track. Hated to lose, really hated it."

"You say Galmont owns a couple of SuperSports now? How do you know?"

"Word gets around when somebody lays out hellacious money for cars. I heard he paid more'n double what they were worth."

"I guess he can afford it," Andy said thoughtfully, swallowing the last of his coffee. "Can you tell me anything else about the cars he bought?"

"Not really," Buchek frowned, "I ain't into collectin' so I didn't pay much attention. I just heard he paid too much for 'em."

"I see," Andy nodded. "Would you ah, happen to remember what model the cars were?"

"Yeah," Buchek said, brightening a little, "I think they was all '61's. '61 SuperSports."

The noise brought him down. McMahon had been sure it would. All the soundproofing in the world couldn't muffle the roar of three finely tuned racing engines howling wide open in a closed garage.

He came prepared, of course. Dressed in an olive drab jumpsuit and carrying an M-1 carbine, he looked every inch the professional soldier he'd been. But McMahon expected that also. He waited, flattened against the wall adjacent to the soundproofed door, and pressed

the muzzle of his .38 against Galmont's temple the moment he stepped out. The colonel hesitated a moment, then lowered the carbine without being told. Very professional indeed. McMahon took the weapon out of his hands and tossed it aside.

"Evening, colonel," Andy shouted over the roar coming through the drying room door, "sorry about the lateness of the hour. Hope I woke you."

"Sergeant McMahon? My God, I might have shot you. What the hell are you doing down here?"

"I had such a great time this afternoon I thought I'd come back. You've got a terrific collection, colonel, in fact it's even better than you said it was. You told me you owned a Morgan, but you must have forgotten a couple. There are three of them in the drying room, though they don't seem to be drying. They're all in perfect shape. And since Chris Wilde's unfortunate accident in Avery Radmore's SS, I'm guessing they're the last mint condition '61 SuperSports in the world."

"Look, you can't let them run wide open like that! They'll destroy themselves!"

"I kinda like the sound. There's real power there, raw power. It must be a helluva kick knowing you own them all. A—what did you call it—a per-

manent victory? Quite a coup. Of course you'd probably want to wait a decent interval before showing them, but it shouldn't take long. People have short memories, and as you said, what's one gay more or less?"

"All right, all right, I underestimated you, sergeant, but it's not too late to remedy that. We can work something out."

"Can we? Like what?"

"Like a million. In cash. Deposited in Switzerland or anywhere you like. You can be set for life, sergeant. For life!"

"That's a lot of money for one dead gay."

"You're damn right it is, especially since he wasn't the primary objective anyway. The car was. Wilde was strictly a target of opportunity, icing on the cake."

"And you didn't have to get down off the mountain afterward, did you? You belonged there."

"I hid in plain sight," Galmont conceded. "I was a course judge. After the crash people were milling around like sheep and I just joined the crowd. Simplicity, sergeant, the key component of any successful action."

"You should have consulted your computer," McMahon said.

"What are you talking about?"

"You said your computer helped you make deals. You should have checked it before

you made me an offer, colonel. For background information. For Chris Wilde's real name, for instance. It was McMahon. Christopher Ian McMahon. He was my younger brother, Galmont. And I don't know what your computer figures the going rate for a brother is, but I know you don't have enough. Not nearly enough."

"Perhaps not," Galmont said slowly, "but I have enough to make a fight of it, sergeant. You really don't have much of a case, you know. Are you sure you won't reconsider my offer?"

"No chance," McMahon said, lifting the slim Sony mini-corder far enough out of his breast-pocket for Galmont to see it. "And my case may be stronger than you think."

Galmont's thin mouth narrowed and his shoulders sagged, but only a little. He'd been a soldier a long time. And he knew about lost causes. "I guess we'll find out in court," he said. "Now, can I turn off the damned cars?"

"Go ahead," Andy nodded, "no point in damaging the evidence."

Galmont opened the drying room door, hesitated a moment as the roar of the engines and the exhaust stench met him full force, then he covered his mouth with a handkerchief and plunged into the room.

McMahon slid the recorder out of his pocket, rewound part of the tape, and played it back. Only bits and pieces of their conversation were audible. Most of it had been drowned out by the engine noise. A pity. But perhaps it was for the best. As the colonel said, simplicity . . .

He slammed the drying room door and jammed a chair against it. Then he went into Galmont's office to type the colonel's confession/suicide note into the computer.

It was quiet in the office, peaceful. He could barely hear Galmont pounding on the drying room door.

And after a while, the noise stopped.

THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH



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The Irregulars at work? The Dirty Dozen? Sea urchins? We will give a prize of \$25 to the person who invents the best mystery story (in 250 words or less—and be sure to include a crime, please), based on the above photograph. The story will be printed in a future issue. Reply to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10017.

The winning entry for the August Mysterious Photograph will be found on page 155.

Children of the Silo

by
Michael
Beres



Inside the capsule, Donovan could feel the motion and could hear the clatter of the capsule being lowered into a shipping crate. And he could hear the muted sounds of the crate being nailed shut. If he'd had claustrophobia he surely would have gone over the edge by now, or he would have taken deep breaths to allow the breathing mixture to put him back into the full state of suspended

Illustration by Jim Odbert

animation. During training he had discovered his ability to come out of suspended animation several times without his trainers knowing. The method was something like counting to ten over and over. He would count, concentrate, program his mind with numbers, and awaken minutes or hours or days into his sleep. The only problem was that when he did awaken he was not exactly certain of how long it had been.

Donovan understood the need for secrecy. If the other side knew the approximate location of a silo it wouldn't take much effort with satellite scanning to pinpoint the exact location and assign a silo killer laser satellite to it. And if that happened the silo and its missiles would have to be subtracted, leading to a dangerous imbalance for some period of time. The secrecy had another benefit, too. No one wanted a silo in their back yard or anywhere within a hundred miles of where they lived. Therefore it was best to keep the locations of the underground silos secret from everyone, even the men and women who were assigned to them.

The fact that he would be locked in a silo with two others for an entire year did not bother him. If he had had any fears of that, the training would surely have brought it out. And he did not fear being put in suspended animation. Even with his ability to control the suspended animation somewhat, he was more than willing to put himself under after awakening himself for a moment or two. Another advantage given for putting him under was to allow several months to pass so that knowledge of political situations would have no effect on performance. During the time he was under, the balance of power would have shifted back and forth several times and many smaller countries would have aligned themselves accordingly in the nuclear stalemate that needed to be maintained.

The capsule was swinging slightly from side to side, the crate probably being hoisted by a crane. The mild shifting of his weight from left to right was nauseating. Time to sleep. He repeated the rhythm, the cycles, the one-two-three-four-five-six-seven-eight-nine-ten to himself. He took a deep breath from the mixture that smelled somewhat like leaves raked in a pile, and slept.

A dream came. He was in a room lying on a bed. The walls and the ceiling were covered with maps, maps of the world, maps of countries and oceans and cities. Directly above him was the almost-square map of New Mexico. The squiggles of roads on the map were unrecognizable. Then, as if she were in zero-gravity, his mother

crawled along the ceiling. She wore a robe and her hair was in curlers, just the way she always looked in the kitchen in the morning when she prepared breakfast for him and his father. His mother reached toward the New Mexico map, pointing, smiling at him, falling atop him, her body spreading across him, pinning him in so he could not move. Dark even when he opened his eyes. His breathing restricted.

But when he was able to lift his arms and touch the mask over his mouth and nose, he knew where he was. The capsule, awakened from the sleep by the dream. He knew where he was, yet he did not know. The crate with the capsule inside could be anywhere. A warehouse, or perhaps already at the silo awaiting his tour of duty.

The dream. Some of it real. His room as a boy adorned with maps. But not his mother crawling on the ceiling. She would be in the kitchen calling him. "Come eat, Donnie. I made waffles, Donnie. Where are you this morning? In Africa? In South America? At the South Pole?"

She would come and sit on the edge of the bed so that it would sway to one side. "You've slept enough, Donnie." She would touch his arm and when she went back to the kitchen the bed would sway back again, righting itself.

When Donovan opened and closed his eyes there was no change in the pure blackness of his capsule. If he were yet unborn would it be like this? Was it like this? As a fetus had he awakened in the womb of the mother he never knew? He knew he was adopted when he was very young. His adoptive parents believed in the truth above all, even to the point of being unable to fulfill genuine parental love and admitting it. "We love you almost as much as if you were our own son," said the father one warm afternoon on a visit to the city zoo while they threw protein pebbles to the sad-eyed apes in their clean and tidy cages. After college he never saw his adoptive parents again. To Donovan the terms *father* and *mother* were simply descriptive names given to the man and woman who had raised him.

The capsule seemed to be swaying slightly as it had when he succumbed to sleep. But there was a difference. Instead of a side to side with a mild downward pressure as if swinging from a crane, the side to side was as if atop a pole or on the bed, his mother coming in again and again, trying to awaken him. "Come eat, Donnie. I made waffles, Donnie."

His tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth. He gagged saliva up

from the back of his throat, spread it throughout his mouth and onto his lips. He spoke aloud to check his voice and hearing.

"How long have you been asleep, Donovan?" His voice was muffled rudely by the mask, but he left the mask on in case there was a leak in the fluid or bowel elimination systems. "Where are you, Donovan? Is the rocking motion because you're on a ship? If so it seems regular enough, a fairly smooth voyage. More likely you're on a rocking machine designed to keep your body fluids moving. Down in the old silo on the old rocking machine." He sang to the tune of "Down by the Old Mill Stream." "Down in the old silo rockin'-machine, where I first met me."

But where was that? Where could he place it on a map? If only he could see a map with a line tracing his journey, an X marking the destination. In the dream his mother had pointed to New Mexico, to the lower central region. Just north of the San Andres Range where he had been trained, where he had been packed like a sardine in his capsule. Mustard-colored fluids in bottles at the sides of the capsule. A sardine packed in mustard. Lord, he was hungry! Hungry for food and—and what? If only he knew *where* he was. Had they forgotten a phobia in training? And if there was a phobia for not knowing topographically where on earth he was, what was it called?

He tried to remember if, during his pre-training interviews, anyone had asked about his childhood fondness for maps, his desire to know exactly where he was. He could see the backs of his parents' heads riding in the front seat of the car. Him in the back with his maps and a marker charting the exact position on the journey, at night using a flashlight. Vacations to him had not been valued for the arrival at a desirable destination. They had been an opportunity to chart the surface of a map and to glance out a window to verify the location.

After college he had joined the Air Force and taken every possible opportunity for travel. The farther the better, the less time spent in one place the better. A technician servicing defense systems around the globe.

He spoke aloud again. "So why are you here? Why did you volunteer for this? A year in one place and you won't even know where you are. Utah? Nevada? North Dakota?"

The money. The eventual retirement to unlimited travel. The world would be his after the year in the silo. If only he could sleep the entire year in the silo.

He could feel his heartbeat. It was speeding up. Too fast. Must sleep. He took several deep breaths, closed his eyes, imagined a map of the country above him, a line on the map indicating his exact minute-to-minute position relative to the coasts, to cities, to lakes and rivers. Again, he slept.

"Good morning. Major Donovan? Up an' at 'em, major."

The light was blood-red. His heart felt like an engine running wild in his chest. Someone was lifting his legs, pulling them. Moisture touched his lips, and when he opened his mouth a soft wet probe entered him. The liquid was warm and sweet as he sucked on the probe. A dream?

He raised his hands toward his face and felt a touch of other flesh.

"Relax, major. You don't want to wake up too fast."

The ceiling was lined with pipes and wires painted red. He stared at the intricacy of the ceiling, imagining that it was a map that would tell him where he was. He was certain he had slept a long time. Coming awake during training and even the two or three times he had come awake inside the capsule never felt like this. A baby fresh from the womb. The sweet liquid he suckled spread a pleasant, triumphant warmth throughout his body. Then he began to itch all over.

Captain Lacy had a full beard and spoke quite softly. "My voice doesn't echo off the walls this way," said Captain Lacy. "I'll get used to speaking in a normal voice as soon as I get on the outside. And you, major, will begin speaking softly like the rest of us. It comes with the job."

"Where are the others?"

"In their quarters with their sponsors. They've found that it's easier to get acclimated this way. Each of us short-timers spends the first few hours with his replacement."

"Why does my skin itch so?"

"Because it hasn't had to flex and stretch in quite a while. You'll feel fine after a hot shower. Then we'll have lunch with the others."

As his eyes adjusted Captain Lacy turned up the normal lighting and the ceiling and walls turned from red to grey. But there were other colors, too. Pinks and blues and oranges of the tags stuck to pipes and wires. It was like a map with cities identified in various colors, the pipes and wires raised, giving shadows, a wonderful relief map.

Captain Lacy's face came over him. His hair was black, his face pinkish, his cheeks rosy, his eyes blue. Santa Claus with a black beard. The color had done it. Now that the normal lighting was on he felt alive again.

"It's good to be awake," he said.

Captain Lacy smiled. "I know. I know."

The six of them ate lunch together seated about a large round table in the galley. Captain Lacy and Lieutenants Boyle and Francis, all three with beards, devoured fresh vegetables and fruit that had been brought through the air locks with the three capsules. The new arrivals, himself, Captain Orr, and Lieutenant Fazio, were restricted to puddings and liquids for two days to acclimate their systems to food again.

Unlike the room in which he had awakened, with its grey walls and exposed conduits and pipes and wires, the galley was quite pleasant. Wood-grained cabinets surrounded them. Indirect lighting at imaginary windows came through ivory curtains. The low acoustic ceiling gave a cosy, quiet feeling as if they were in the kitchen of a small home.

They chattered like birds during the meal, Lacy, Boyle, and Francis asking about the outside while he and Orr and Fazio recounted what they could remember. The colonization of the Moon base by several hundreds from each power, the signing of the Antarctic Treaty, the California earthquake, the Chicago Cubs winning the World Series. But these bits of news could be two months or several months old depending upon how long he and Orr and Fazio had been asleep.

After lunch—if it was really lunchtime, could have been midnight up top—Captain Lacy gave instructions.

Captain Lacy leaned back in his swivel chair, reaching above and behind his head, opening and closing a cabinet door as he spoke. This particular cabinet contained row upon row of canned vegetables. Lacy's tan uniform was stained at the armpits.

"So, here we are, gentlemen. Us at the end of our stint and you just beginning. But don't worry, the year will be finished before you know it."

Boyle and Francis both scratched their beards and smiled at one another. Lacy looked at them, coughed and continued.

"We'll be down here with you for one full week. Each of you will be trained by your sponsor to take over his duties and his shift. That means I'll train Major Donovan, Lieutenant Boyle will take

care of Captain Orr, and Lieutenant Francis, Lieutenant Fazio. Donovan will take over my position as exec, but since rank doesn't mean much down here, we'll drop all the usual formalities. And since the computer recognizes us by last name we've found it best to do the same. All communication with HQ is via the computer. It's scrambled and on a variable delay. And, as you already know, all coordinates are coded."

Captain Lacy tipped forward on the chair, rested his elbows on the table, and looked to each of the newcomers. "Believe me, gentlemen. There is absolutely no way of determining our location. We've been here a year and, as far as we know, we could be in a suburb of Chicago or we could be in the Rocky Mountains. The best thing to do, psychologically, is to immediately pick a spot where you think you are, and stick with that. Don't dwell on it. After all, it doesn't really matter anyway."

Captain Lacy stood and took his tray to the cupboard where he scraped his plate into the disposal and stacked his plate and utensils and coffee cup in the dishwasher. His movements were quick, automatic, a machine feeding machines. Then he turned toward them.

"Let's get to it, gentlemen. And if you don't understand anything, no matter how minor, *ask*. Donovan. Let's go. You're scheduled for R and R now but we can get in a grand tour before bedtime."

For Donovan bedtime was 0400 to 1200 hours. As he lay in his bunk he stared at the intricacy of the plumbing and wiring on the ceiling, all of it lighted by the makeshift red glow that was supposed to be his night. He closed his eyes and remembered the layout of the entire facility again, a three-dimensional map in his mind. A detailed map showing control rooms, life support modules, stores, the galley, and the vertical shaft to the outside. But the map floated as if in space, an unmoored life raft at sea. If only he knew where the installation was located he would be satisfied. Would he go crazy? Only six days gone and his desire to be grounded, to know where he was—and when—nagged at him like something physical, like a narcotic that had invaded his system.

Lacy knew nothing of his desire—or was it a phobia?—to know where he was. During the week of training he had learned well. After today's session Lacy had praised him. "You'll be a fine exec, Donovan. And when you get out you can look forward to just about picking your own commission. You'll be able to go wherever you

want in this man's army." He did not tell Lacy that what he really wanted with all his being was to know where he was right now. And to that end he had formulated a plan.

He was taking over Lacy's position as exec and control systems officer. And as such he had been trained this week in the operation of all systems internal to the installation. This included life support and communication equipment. But it also included exit and entry controls. These controls he had studied especially hard. A fine riddle, a game like the ones he had played on his computer as a boy. How to get through the series of hatches and air locks without detection.

After two days of studying diagrams he found that undetected escape was impossible unless the system were reprogrammed manually. And this reprogramming could only be done at a time when the hatches were cycled. Tomorrow, when Lacy and Boyle and Francis left, he could do it. He could be ready at each panel, apply the appropriate patches at the appropriate times. And, once done, he would be able to come and go as he wished during his stay.

Perhaps he would be satisfied simply by knowing that he could leave whenever he wanted. Perhaps he would easily make it through the year just knowing he was free to come and go, free to find out where he was. As Lacy had said, in the mountains or just outside Chicago?

His mind was made up. Tomorrow, after the year's worth of garbage was hoisted up the shaft, after the three short-timers had begun their ascent, he would order Orr and Fazio to their posts and patch the appropriate panels as the hatches above opened and closed.

After a month in what was designated as Silo 414 by the computer, Donovan was surprised at how little he saw or spoke with Orr and Fazio. Their only meetings were brief conversations between shifts or an occasional meal together in the galley. They usually ate together and sometimes played cards in the galley on Sundays. Although they did not really know what day of the week it was, or what time it was, they had agreed for their own purposes, for their internal clocks, that the old crew had departed at 0800 on Monday morning, the beginning of a work week, the beginning of their year in Silo 414.

As he went off duty, as he began his R and R shift to be followed by his bedtime shift, Donovan congratulated himself on waiting

so long before his excursion to the outside. He had been more than patient, but now he was ready. He had stowed a heavy parka near the shaft in case he came out to a blizzard or sub-freezing temperatures of a northern state, perhaps even Alaska. He had entered a DO NOT DISTURB message into his console. He had studied Orr's and Fazio's habits during the month and was relatively certain they would not seek him out in his quarters.

Would it be day or night up top? Was he in the Eastern, Central, Mountain, or Pacific time zone? Soon he would know. He had set the final patch in the series he had set a month earlier. Now the hatches could be opened and closed without detection. The last hatch, the only one that could not be opened manually from the outside, he would leave open until he returned. The only way he could be discovered was if the shaft came out in the middle of a city—not very likely—or if there was an attack while he was outside. And if that happened, who would care that he had come out. He would simply die like the other poor souls above.

He set his watch alarm for four hours. He had decided to limit his stay to four hours in order to avoid detection. But surely in that time he would be able to gather clues of his location. He put on the parka and began the climb up the ladder. If it was warm above he would simply leave the parka behind near the top hatch.

It was night. The stars were visible from horizon to horizon. No mountains, no cities, no trees, the terrain flat. He recognized several constellations, but without knowing the time of day he could not position himself east or west. He was north, though. The temperature—about zero, he guessed—the fact that it was winter, and the positions of the stars told him north. Perhaps near the Canadian border, perhaps even in Alaska. He had not studied astronomy sufficiently to know exactly. If he had known he was to come out on a clear night he would certainly have done so.

As his eyes became accustomed to the faint starlight, he saw a line running at an angle not too distant. He set his compass and walked toward it across a lumpy farm field—plowed for winter? Soon he was walking on gravel. He reset his compass, marked his entry onto the road by piling clods of dirt in the form of an X, and set off to the southwest.

Soon there was a light, then another. A town. He lit his watch face, only forty-five minutes had passed. Soon he would know. He would see a name on a sign. He imagined himself back in his

quarters looking up the town on a map. Though the air was crisp and fresh compared to the stale air of Silo 414 he did not care. His desire was simply to find out where he was and get back undetected. He was a boy again, a boy at his computer logged onto a network where he did not belong. A game of hide-and-seek, his chest feeling light, his head floating in excitement and anticipation. The lights of the town getting closer and closer, roofs visible now against the sky, steep, sloped roofs with rounded edges. A make-believe village, a fantasy land.

"Astanaulivat!"

Astanaulivat? He stopped. A man came from the darkness to his right. The man was outlined against the lights of the town. A large-headed man. No, a hat, a fur hat. And a long coat. And, flashing in starlight, a rifle pointed at him. The man moved behind him, nudged him forward toward the town. Within a few steps another man with a rifle joined them and the two began speaking in Russian.

He was blindfolded and his hands were bound behind with icy handcuffs. He was led toward the town. He could tell by the sounds of dogs barking and an occasional car. A truck came from the town and he was put inside. As the truck bumped and lurched on the road he wondered if the Russians were simply a small force or part of some major invasion. He must be in Alaska, perhaps near the sea where these Russians had landed. He may have given away the site of Silo 414 but, if he could get away, he might be a hero. He might be the one who warned of the Russians on American soil. He pulled at the handcuffs and was promptly poked in the ribs.

He was taken into a building, guards at both sides holding him, one behind poking him in the back with a rifle, one in front giving orders. No chance to escape. Not yet. Not until he knew his options, or knew where he was.

His blindfold was removed. He was in a room with bare, white-washed walls. He sat on a bench before an unpainted wooden table. Whoever had removed the blindfold was unlocking the handcuffs. He looked from side to side and saw no one else, only a closed wood door to his right. Then the man stepped from behind him, put the handcuffs on the table, and sat across from him.

The man was in his fifties, round-faced, greying hair matted down where a hat had been. The man could be Russian but since

he wore an overcoat over a plain grey business suit he could not tell. The man's cheeks were rosy. Too much vodka or just the cold outside? The man stared at him, blinking. His eyes were blue.

"So," said the man. "Let's get on with it." The man spoke without an accent. If anything he sounded like a midwesterner.

"Because of your training I know better than to ask questions. So I'll do the talking, Major Donovan. You know, of course, that you won't be returning to 414. The other two have already been notified of your absence and we'll have a replacement in there shortly. My name is Bernstein, by the way. I'm with the State Department."

Bernstein stood, removed his overcoat and laid it on the far end of the table. Then he sat back down. "Warm in here."

He stared at Bernstein. Bernstein the Russian? KGB?

"Major, you've caused a serious breach in security. At the moment I'm not interested in your reason for leaving the installation. What I am interested in is getting your full cooperation so that we can successfully seal the security breach. I'll get right to the point, major. Silo 414 is in the Soviet Union, several hundred miles north-east of Moscow. The name of the small village you were walking toward is unimportant. In fact, the less you know beyond what I've already said will make your debriefing a lot easier."

He imagined a map of Russia, could remember only the rough positions of Leningrad and Moscow and Gorky. He laughed. Russia indeed. He watched Bernstein's face for a reaction, but Bernstein simply stared.

"The humor of the situation will pass quickly, major. The Russian soldiers who found you now know that Americans are manning 414 and that will have to be dealt with." Bernstein took a notebook from his pocket and flipped through it as he spoke. "Your attempted bypass of the egress alarm system was detected last month, but we could not put guards out there to wait for your possible attempted escape without arousing suspicions. And we thought that perhaps you had bypassed the circuits simply to satisfy your psychological tendencies. We know much about you, major. More than you think."

Bernstein put the notebook away. "You'll be put back into suspended animation and shipped back in a capsule for debriefing. Punishment for disobeying orders would be pointless, since you'll never serve in a missile installation again. Any questions?"

Bernstein appeared ready to leave, his hands braced on the edge of the table.

"Wait. Of course I have questions. I don't know if you're a Russian or an American or what, but I'll ask anyway."

"Go ahead, major."

"Are you trying to tell me that Americans are manning Russian missiles?"

"Yes."

"And just where are those missiles aimed?"

"Why, at the U.S., of course."

"Who knows about this?"

"Very few. Only the highest authorities, and of course the computers know."

"But what about the capsules? What about the packaging and shipping?"

"The computers print out labels and shipping instructions for a series of crates. You came over by ship."

"And I suppose you're going to tell me that Russians are manning American missiles."

"Is that what you want me to tell you?"

He slammed his fist on the table. Bernstein blinked, stared at his fist.

"No need to get violent, major. My job here isn't to give you the facts. I'm just doing my job. And I'm also giving you the courtesy of asking some questions before you're put under."

"But it doesn't make sense!"

"Of course it does. They man our missile silos and we man theirs. It makes perfect sense. We have a vested interest in making sure that their missile silos are secure because if they should ever weaken in their capability then *we* would be tempted to start a conflict. And, vice versa, the Russians have the same vested interest in our missiles. The system was designed never to be used and this arrangement, to my way of thinking, assures that."

He imagined a map of the world, a map with miniature missiles pointed east and west. It really didn't make any difference. Actually it did make sense now that he knew. The leaders of the two powers had actually talked, had actually agreed on something, had agreed on a method to maintain the balance of power so cleverly.

Bernstein looked at his watch. "Well now, major. I must go. A technician will be here shortly to begin the procedure. Please don't make trouble."

"I won't. Now I understand. But could you— Would it be too much to ask if I could be shown the route of my return journey?"

"I don't see why not, major. I'll get a map and show you while they get you ready."

In the dark hallway outside the room Bernstein watched with a man in a fur hat as three soldiers accompanied by a technician wheeled a large packing crate into the room.

"What is it you have there?" said the man.

"A map," said Bernstein. "He wanted to know where he's going."

"And you showed him?"

"I showed him a route home."

"You know he must be eliminated. A man so insane he breaks out of a silo cannot be trusted."

"I know. I gave him a dream to go to the bottom of the sea with."

"He is insane. The very fact that he so easily agreed with our methods of deterrence proves it."

Bernstein smiled. "He's young and foolish."

"And we are old and foolish."

"Perhaps," said Bernstein. "Perhaps you're right."

The man in the fur hat put his arm around Bernstein. "Of course I'm right. Come, comrade, I have excellent vodka in my office. You drink it with orange juice I believe."

"Yes," said Bernstein. "Orange juice is just fine."

"Good. Several crates of oranges arrived from your state of Florida along with the replacement for 414. We must make use of the oranges before they spoil."

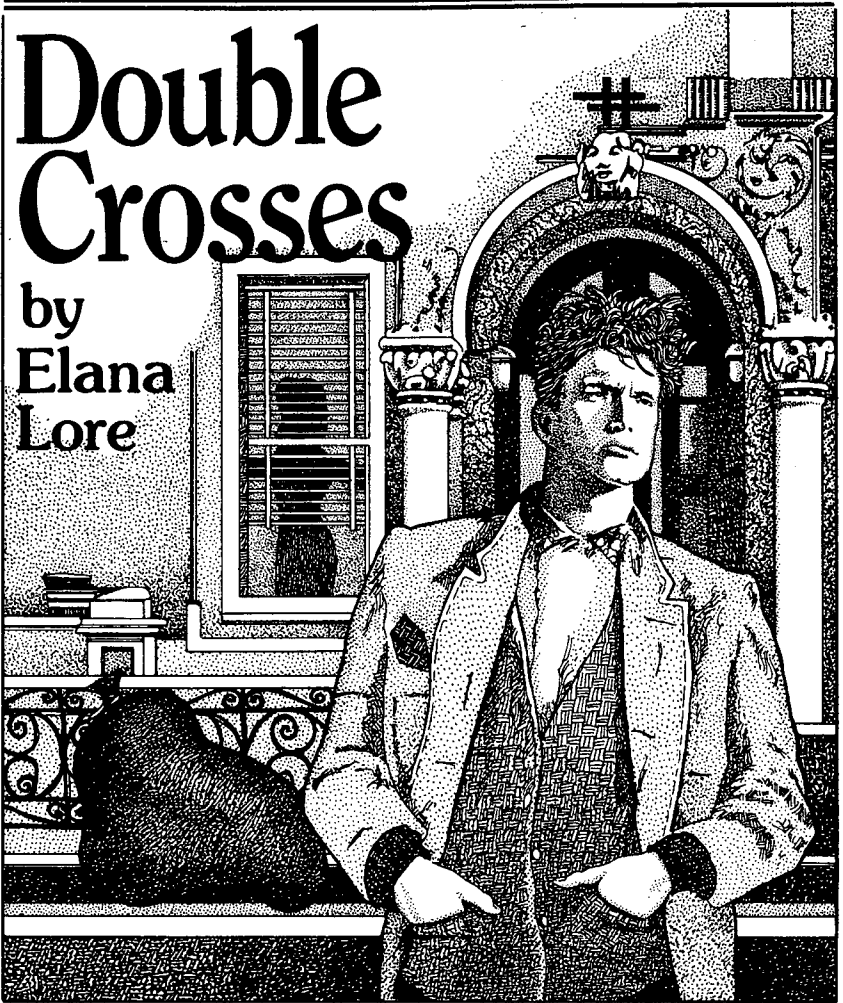
As they walked down the hallway the sounds of hammering came from the room. The packing crate was being prepared for its journey—first by truck on bone-jarring roads, then the swaying and clacking of a railroad car, then the rolling of the ship.

"In a way I envy him," said Bernstein. "To fall asleep at peace with the world and simply to stay asleep would be my choice of death."

"Mine also," said the man in the fur hat. "Only a fool would wish otherwise."

Double Crosses

by
Elana
Lore



Collin Hartman felt strange killing Barton. He didn't even know the man's first name. He had this weird idea that murder was a personal thing, sort of like sex, where you were supposed to do

it to somebody you knew. But in this case, it was a matter of not having any other alternatives that had driven him to using the marble rolling pin to flatten the fellow.

He had been surprised when

he hadn't been able to talk Barton out of calling the police, but not panicked. He had taken a deep breath, like they'd taught him in improv class, and the idea had just occurred to him. A little voice had said, "Collin, this is your only way out of this one," and he had obeyed.

He had looked around the elegant kitchen—gleaming blue and white tile floors, teak center cooking island, shiny copper pots and pans—and had seen the glint of sunlight reflecting off the rolling pin on the counter. It was like a sign from above. And Collin firmly believed in signs. He had picked up the rolling pin and used it before Barton had time to react. His motion classes had come in handy. He was a smooth dancer, too.

He felt as he had when he'd had that car accident when he'd been in high school. Just before the impact, his whole life had flashed before him. This time it was different. Instead of his past, the two alternate presents sort of rushed out, like on a computer printout. The bottom line was, if Barton lived, he would go to jail. If Barton died, he could take the money and go away with Ariana.

Collin didn't know what you were supposed to do after you murdered someone, so he went to the bathroom, washed his

hands, looked at his face in the mirror to see if it looked any different (slightly flushed, but basically the same), and then decided he needed a nice hot cup of tea.

Ethel Berg was a kook—an aging opera star who fugued in and out of her starring roles in the middle of a conversation—but she had a nice apartment, and had supplied him with plenty of good food. He felt bad about leaving a dead body in her kitchen, seeing as how it was the only room in the house that had been renovated since about the American Revolution, but at the moment he didn't know what else to do with the corpse.

Collin put water on to boil, rooted around in the dishwasher for the mug he had been using, then rooted some more in the cabinets for tea. Ethel had left him a wide selection. He decided the full-bodied flavor of English Breakfast was what he needed, so he sloshed some water around in the teapot to heat it up, then shoveled tea into the pot.

Collin was still a little bit high from the confrontation with Barton and the violent murder, so he bounced around the kitchen, somewhat at a loss for something to do while the tea steeped. He thought variously about fixing a sandwich, even

though he didn't have much of an appetite, calling Ariana, who was at work, and just walking out of the apartment. Ethel was due back this evening, so he was already packed and ready to go, as soon as he washed the dishes from tea—and maybe disposed of the body. He was unsure now about leaving it.

He sat at the little alcove table and sipped from his mug, occasionally glancing surreptitiously at the corpse, which had unfortunately landed at the foot of the table.

Collin had been pulling the old apartment scam. Between the acting lessons, dates with Ariana, the visits to tea leaf readers, astrologers, and psychics to find out what was wrong with their relationship, and a couple of bad days at Belmont, he had gone through most of his earnings from his last caper.

Collin had spent months planning the apartment scam, babysitting countless house plants, pets, and collections of whatever it was that rich people who went to Florida and Europe for extended periods of time collected, looking for the right mark.

There's a real housing shortage in New York, and prices are astronomical, so a nice apartment that's selling under market can attract hundreds of prospective tenants. At least

that's how Collin had figured it. Also, it had been done before and written up in the papers, so he had a good idea of how to proceed.

Collin had registered with this house-sitting service under one of his stage names and had gotten plenty of good jobs, but there were certain restrictions. It was hard to even have an overnight guest of the opposite sex in a doorman building, so those things were out. And some of his clients had nosy neighbors who kept bringing their own hairy little pets over for play dates with the countless Fidos and Fifis that populated the Upper East Side. He had fairly jumped, therefore, when the opportunity to take an apartment in the East 50's for two weeks—brownstone, no doorman, eccentric old lady w/houseplants no pets—had come up.

He had spent the first week doing research on the place. It was a floor-through, which meant some privacy from other tenants, and the super, Barton, had the whole block to take care of, so he wasn't around much.

The second week he had placed the ad in the *Sunday Times*. He was very careful—the apartment wasn't undervalued too much, and the furniture being as old and moth-eaten as it was, it was easy to say his

elderly aunt had just died and he was trying to unload the apartment so he could get back to L.A. and his acting career.

The calls had started coming in on Saturday evening, right after the early editions of the paper were unloaded at Grand Central Station. By Sunday evening, he had raked in almost twenty-five thousand, a large percentage of it in cash-under-the-table bribes.

Unfortunately, while he had been out at the bank depositing the money in his account, one of his marks had come back to look at the apartment again (pushy New Yorkers) and had run into Barton, who was repairing a faucet in the apartment below.

Damn.

Collin took one last, cautious sip from his mug, careful to leave a slosh at the bottom for the tea leaves, and twirled the mug three times, just like Madame Dora did. He couldn't very well call her right now and explain the situation, so he tried to read the patterns himself but he didn't see anything that made sense to him.

He glanced at his watch. It was almost three. Ethel was due back around six. That gave him three hours to come up with a plan for disposing of Barton's body. The more he thought about it, the more he realized he couldn't just leave him there.

Ethel might have a heart attack finding him, and he was afraid he might have given her some clue to his real identity when they had met.

He checked under the sink for garbage bags. Barton was a little guy, but still too big for a regular Hefty. Maybe a lawn and leaf bag. He hied himself down to the local supermarket, bought a ten-pack and some rubber gloves, and raced back, wondering what he'd do with the body once he bagged it.

Trash day was tomorrow, but it might leak, or attract animals before then. And God forbid some bag person coming along looking for empty soda cans or food. No, this required a car. And then he thought of Barton's. Barton drove an old Mercedes—probably had a brother in the business, Collin thought.

Collin frisked the corpse, removing his I.D., the Walkman, and the key ring Barton kept on his belt, about seventy dollars from his wallet, and a nice diamond pinky ring that he thought he could have sized to fit him, then stuffed Barton into the trash bag, all scrunched up. It was a tight fit, but he had gotten the job done before Barton had started to stiffen up too much. He wasn't too keen on touching him, since he was cooling off a bit, but what can you do? It was an emergency.

He walked around the bag a couple of times, realized it looked very much like there was a body inside, and lifted a couple of ancient towels from the bathroom to round out the shape a bit.

By now it was almost five o'clock, and Collin was beginning to perspire. Sooner or later he was going to have to go out. He had cleaned the apartment up the night before. Now he did a quick swipe of all the surfaces he could find, trying to remove fingerprints, and then stacked his belongings by the door. He did a couple of trial runs, taking trash out to the containers in the basement well by the front door. Fine. Rush hour was starting, and the street was full of pedestrians.

He took a walk around the block, found Barton's car not far away, went back to the apartment, took a few deep breaths, and started out with his backpack, his suitcase, and the body on a king-sized luggage carrier. He prayed the bag wouldn't break.

Things went fine at first. No problem. Then he hit a rough piece of pavement and the body shifted. Collin almost wet his pants. He waited until a young couple with briefcases passed him, then righted his burden and went on, more carefully this time.

He fumbled with the trunk

lock—Jeez, Barton carried a lot of keys—all the while trying to keep himself from looking around to see if he was being watched, and deposited his trash bag, trying to lift it as though it had clothes in it instead of a body wrapped in terrycloth. He slammed the trunk, went around to the back door and deposited his backpack, the suitcase, and the luggage carrier.

Collin hastily went back to the apartment, cleaned up the blood, the rolling pin, and the sink, and gave the place one last fond glance before he left. He stuck Ethel's keys in her mailbox, as they had agreed, and went out to the Mercedes.

Collin hadn't driven in a long time—there wasn't much need to in New York, and he couldn't afford car insurance anyway—but he managed to get the car revved up and going. He raced down to his apartment, took a shower, and tried to get Ariana on the phone. He wasn't sure what to do with the car, but he thought he should leave it somewhere. Barton wasn't exactly going to be reporting it stolen, and he lived alone, so there wasn't much danger for a while of anyone's noticing it was gone. He certainly had plenty of time to get to the airport with Ariana tonight if he could persuade her to come with him.

He didn't see much problem with that. After all, Iosop, the psychic he'd seen last week, had said he saw Ariana getting married and going away, which had cheered Collin up immensely.

Meanwhile, in another brownstone, this one in the elegant Murray Hill section of New York in the East 30's, on a quiet, treelined street where every other mahogany door had the brass nameplate of a medical practice or a foundation, a distinguished looking middle-aged man, elegantly dressed, was fumbling with a Phillips head screwdriver in the fading evening sunlight. The street was deserted, and even the sounds of traffic were distant, muted.

"Damn," he whispered as a tiny screw resisted his efforts. The brass doorplate read *The Porphyria Foundation, est. 1922*. Inside, he could hear the shuffle of boxes and furniture being moved.

A beautiful young woman—dark-haired, olive-skinned, with the palest of violet eyes—opened the door cautiously from the other side and glanced up and down the street. Seeing no one, she stepped up on tiptoes to kiss him, pressing her body into his.

"We're almost done, Carl."

"Okay, Ariana," he whispered back. "Call Gunther and have him come with the van now. I'll help you move things out front when I'm done here."

The phone rang at eight that night, waking Ethel Berg from a sound sleep. She was so tired that she hadn't even bothered to unpack. She pulled herself to a sitting position, fumbled for her glasses on the nightstand, and glanced foggily at the bedside clock.

"Hi," the voice said. "I copied down the phone number when I was there yesterday, and thought I'd call and see if I can move in a few days early. . . . Who is this?"

"You have the wrong number," she said, dropping the phone back on the receiver with a yawn.

A few seconds later it rang again, and the caller repeated his little spiel.

"Young man, I'm afraid you have the wrong number. There is no apartment available here."

"Is this 555-1916?"

"Yes, as a matter of fact, it is."

"And the address is 1607 East 52nd Street, apartment three?"

"Yes."

"Well . . . the man I talked to yesterday said his Aunt Ethel had died and he was renting her apartment."

Ethel, by then, had gotten her mental processes in some semblance of order, but when she figured out what the caller was saying, she began to feel her face go pale under the layers of now-caked-on old-lady face powder.

"Well, my name is Ethel, but I'm certainly not dead, nor do I have any intention of giving up my apartment." And with that she slammed down the receiver again.

After the third such call, she removed the jack from the wall, vowing, if she could remember to do so, to call Mr. Barton in the morning.

Ariana and Collin had met at an acting class that was so far over on the West Side that it was practically in the Hudson River. The building was shabby, in one of those Hell's Kitchen neighborhoods where there were only spotty efforts at renovation, and a lot of those seemed to be permanently weighted down by several layers of spray-painted graffiti.

It had been love at first sight for Collin, but Ariana had seen it as an opportunity. For her, life was full of opportunities, most of them wearing pants. Back in those days, she had been into lifting credit cards and small-time stuff like that. Collin had been a big help to

her, especially when they'd been working hotels.

They had lost track of each other for a couple of years, until Collin had run into her at a sidewalk cafe near Lincoln Center a few months before.

Collin, of course, wanted to pick up where they had left off, but Ariana had made it clear that she had gone on to bigger and better things.

The effort to win her back had been more or less a matter of proving fiscal soundness, as Collin saw it. Ariana was still into money, so he had to get some—fast. According to her, she had married a wealthy but elderly man who had died suddenly, leaving her independently wealthy. She was into charity work now.

Collin sensed a false note in there somewhere, but he didn't have a good enough ear to pick up on which one it was. Ariana certainly looked good—better than she had before. Her figure had filled out some, but she still had those pale violet eyes, the silky dark hair and exotic complexion, the pouty lips . . .

God, he lusted after her. But she had been so distant in the past few weeks. . . .

Collin tried to call Ariana again, but got no answer. She didn't even have her machine on. Suddenly, he got a strange mental picture of her at work.

Maybe a portent, hm? he thought, reaching for his Manhattan directory to look up her number at the Foundation.

Ariana was a little bit sweaty, and her jeans were covered with dust. Her eyes met Carl's across the now empty office as Gunther left with the last load, fully paid off and ready to roll. It was a mesmerizing, predatory look—a hungry look, actually.

She threw her head back, shaking dust out of her hair, then crossed the room to him and began to disrobe, those haunting eyes never leaving his.

"On the floor?" he said with a quirky smile, eyebrows raised. "We can be seen from the street, you know."

"One last time, my dear," she said, mouthing his neck desperately.

"Are you sure it's been disconnected?" Collin asked the operator. "It's not just out of service or something?"

"I'm positive," the operator said firmly.

"Was there a forwarding number?"

"Like I told you, *no*," Collin heard an abrupt click in his ear.

About half an hour later, he parked the Mercedes in the next block and walked over to the Porphyria Foundation offices. The sun had set hours

ago, and the night had gotten chilly. Aside from a few bag people lying on grates in the street to keep warm, the whole area was deserted. The street lights cast an eerie glow, and the occasional odd noise made him jump.

He felt the front door. He could see where the plaque had been—and that it was no longer there. He stood on a railing and leaned over to look into the window. There was enough light to see that the place was empty—no furniture, no nothing. Collin had a feeling that *Something Was Happening*—something he wasn't going to like.

He went back to the car finally, and decided to drive around for a while to think things over. Before long, he found himself in Ariana's block on the Upper West Side.

He parked the car, got out, and went to a phone booth to call her again. There was no answer, but while he was there, he saw Ariana leave her building arm in arm with a tall, elegant-looking gentleman. Unfortunately, they were walking straight toward him. As they approached the phone booth, he averted his face and sank into the shadows to avoid being seen. When they passed, he realized who the man was, and why he looked so familiar. It was Dr. Montgomery from the Founda-

tion. That certainly changed the picture.

He wondered if she was pulling a scam on him. He wouldn't have been surprised. He thought about following the two of them, but decided that was childish. He went back to the car, pulling his jacket up around his shoulders, and waited for them to return.

At about one, the two of them strolled back, arm in arm. He watched her window for a while. The lights stayed on until almost two. He waited for Dr. Montgomery to leave, but he didn't. Feeling more dejected than he had thought possible, Collin went home, a plan forming in his mind.

Very few people know there are organizations that rate charities to make sure they're not putting all the dough they've collected into their own pockets. But several exist, and Marcus Schmidt, a thickly bespectacled little man who prided himself on balancing his own checkbook down to the penny each month, even if it took hours, worked for one of them as a field agent.

Despite the fact that Marcus had majored in accounting, he also prided himself on his knowledge of the classics in music and literature and other areas. In other words, his mother

had wanted him to be a doctor, and he had failed her miserably, so he was trying to make amends.

Marcus was a very frustrated man in many ways, and he took it out mostly on those who didn't live up to his high standards of charitable distribution, since he didn't have a wife to beat or a dog to kick. Those who knew what was really cooking in the charitable foundation world knew that his was not the largest or most respected of the monitoring agencies and showed him the door when he got really obnoxious. Which was why his boss had lately sent him out to the newer and smaller organizations—ones that couldn't fight back as easily.

It's hard to say when Marcus first figured out that the Porphyria Foundation wasn't exactly kosher. It's easy to figure that, wherever he is now, he'd like people to think he glommed onto it the minute he heard the name, but those who knew what a jerk he was suspected it had come much later—like right before Dr. Montgomery had raised the little silver gun and pointed it at his chest. There was a certain wry look in Marcus's eyes there at the last—one that showed an understanding and peculiar sense of humor that probably would have made Marcus's mother proud. Unfortunately, there was no one to

see it except Carl Montgomery, and he had other things on his mind.

It had been a long day for Collin, and he was exhausted. He fell asleep almost immediately after setting his alarm.

The following morning he was up bright and early, full of determination. He dressed in his best casual stuff—real preppy clothes; with an old-money gold and blue color scheme—and drove back up to Ariana's apartment.

Luck was with him—he found a parking space on the first turn around the block. As he pulled in, he saw Ariana and Dr. Montgomery coming out of the apartment, suitcases in hand.

"Hi," he said, walking up to the stoop.

Ariana's face went through some changes—surprise, guilt, and a few other things—as she looked back and forth from one man to the other.

"Hi," she said finally, weakly, and introduced the two men. They both acted cool. "I'm sorry I can't talk to you now, Collin, but I've got to get Dr. Montgomery to the airport in a hurry."

"Oh," Collin said, surprised. "Vacation?"

Ariana thought about it for a minute. Collin could see the

wheels turning. "No. Business trip."

He thought for a minute himself. "Well, I have a meeting in the neighborhood this morning, and thought I'd stop by for a visit."

He glanced at his watch. "I'm a little bit early still," he said.

His face brightened. "Tell you what, though. You're going to have a hard time finding a cab this time of the morning. Why don't you take my car? I won't be needing it until later this afternoon."

Ariana looked at him suspiciously for a moment, during which time he tried to look angelic. Or at least innocent.

"I didn't know you had a car," she said finally.

"Yeah. Just got it. It's an old Mercedes. I like to think of it as a classic, but it's got a few years to go until it really is. Honestly, I don't need it right now, so you're welcome to it."

Ariana and the distinguished doctor exchanged glances, then seemed to come to a decision. "Okay," Ariana said, picking up one of the suitcases. "Where is it?"

He helped Dr. Montgomery carry the luggage, pretending not to notice that some of it looked as though it belonged to Ariana. When they got to the car, Collin fumbled around, pretending he couldn't find the trunk key.

"Well, the luggage will fit in the back seat, won't it?" he said at last.

"Sure."

They stuffed the suitcases in, and Collin handed the keys to Dr. Montgomery.

When they had left, Collin sat on the curb and thought for a while, making sure all the pieces fit. When he was finally sure he'd gotten it right, he got up, went back to the corner phone booth, and dialed 911.

"Hi, I want to report a stolen car. The name is Barton. No, I'm not at home... grey Mercedes... yes, the plate numbers are... East Side... in front of my building... just noticed it was gone a few minutes ago... probably still in the area... thanks a lot."

Collin was feeling pretty good now, so he splurged and took a taxi home.

In the rather dingy offices of Manhattan South, Homicide Division, Detective John Hrudic was attracting more attention from his colleagues than usual. A tall, extraordinarily handsome blond with big blue eyes that inspired the confidence of women and suspects alike, he was holding the telephone receiver to his ear, choking and gasping until the tears began to roll down his face.

Detective Hrudic stood out

plainly from his fellow police detectives not only because of his appearance but because of his immaculate way of dressing. Now, though, it was hard to see the gorgeousness. He was surrounded by a swirl of grey—wall, desks, chairs, faded memos and directives, and foul smoke from his partner's cigar. His partner, a rumpled, food-stained excuse for a human by the name of Flaherty, who usually turned a deaf ear to pleas from his cohorts to send his beloved smokes down to the M.E.'s office for an autopsy, started fanning the air desperately with his hand and moved away from Hrudic's desk, anticipating a medical emergency.

Hrudic, in between chokes, managed to gasp into the receiver, "Are you sure this isn't some kind of joke?"

There was a pause, during which time he fumbled for his handkerchief and mopped the tears from his face.

"Okay," he said, trying to regain his composure. "We'll be right there."

Hrudic motioned to Flaherty. "Let's roll. We've got a homicide in Murray Hill."

He paused in his doorway and called out, "Anybody got a dictionary here?" By some freak accident there actually was one. He paused to look up a word, started laughing again, and left, Flaherty in his wake, rolling

his eyes and shaking his head. He knew from experience that whatever it was, it would be good, but he'd have to wait until Hrudic was ready to share it.

Flaherty didn't have to wait long. The condition of the body was a dead giveaway. Marcus Schmidt had become rather crumpled up in the little storage closet overnight, but even Flaherty could see that there was a stake through his heart, which gave him a clue. These unusual ones were a lot more exciting than the run of the mill Saturday night knifings and shootings. They got good press coverage, for one thing. Flaherty had had his picture in the *New York Post* once before on another case. He liked talking to reporters, using his special cop vocabulary. He was really fond of the word perp. It had a classy ring.

Hrudic was still having a hard time controlling himself. Flaherty watched his ribs quake as he tried to keep from laughing during the rookie cop's recap of the events that had led to the call and, later, as he tried to hold a coherent conversation with the elderly blue-haired secretary who had arrived at the office and found the body.

Flaherty wondered how the perp had gotten the victim to hold still long enough to get the stake in, but decided it was better not to ask, under the cir-

cumstances. He was sure Hrudic would have a good explanation. In the back of his mind some of Flaherty's synapses were trying desperately to connect; he knew the stake in the heart bit had been used before, but he couldn't remember the specific case.

About an hour later, when they were returning to the car, Hrudic took a look around, didn't see anyone particularly paying attention, and did a quick Bela Lugosi imitation, hulking over Flaherty, which he did anyway, sticking out his teeth, and trying to look maniacal, whispering, "I am going to bite your neck."

Flaherty lunged out of the way and darted Hrudic a now-you've-really-lost-it kind of look. Suddenly, the fog cleared and the little marbles all settled into place. "Nah," he said, waving his hand. "Get outta here."

Hrudic settled into the car. "Betcha fifty bucks the M.E. finds a silver bullet in his heart," he said, finally letting himself go, laughing until the tears streamed freely down his face.

"No way," Flaherty said, struggling into his seat belt.

"You know what else?" Hrudic said. "That place . . . it was some kind of foundation or something. But you know what the name of it was? The Porphyria Foundation. You know what porphyria is?"

Flaherty shook his head.

"It's this disease." He started

gasping now. "It's a real one. The medical examiner told me about it. Your gums pull back so it looks like you got big fangs. And your eyes get sensitive to sunlight so you can't go outside. And then you get this allergic reaction to garlic and a craving for blood, because you got something wrong with your own."

Hrudic tried to look serious for a moment. "Sound familiar to you?" he said, raising an eyebrow.

All Flaherty could think to say was "Get outta here" again, so he did, settling back into the seat of the car to think about vampires for a while.

Collin had made a hasty plane reservation to Hawaii. It was kind of short notice to get a passport to any good place—one that had jungles and stuff, where you could really get lost—so he decided to go someplace where he could soak up some UV's and relax. He hadn't bothered to unpack his suitcase from his house-sitting adventure, so all he had to do was toss in his swimming trunks and suntan lotion to make things complete.

He had about three hours until his plane took off—plenty of time for what he had in mind, which was to go to the precinct house as Barton and sign the stolen car report so Ariana

would really be in trouble when they caught her. His apartment-super outfit was laid out on the bed, with Barton's I.D. beside it on the nightstand. He changed hastily, dug around for subway tokens, and checked his appearance in the mirror.

He was Barton—keys jangling from his hip, belt hung low over his gut even though he didn't really have one, stiff-legged kind of walk from carrying tools in his pocket. The only thing that was missing was the toothpick Barton occasionally sucked on, but Collin was afraid he'd get a splinter, or swallow it by accident.

He was pleased—it was a pretty good scam. It was her word against his that he wasn't really Barton, and he'd be long gone by then. Ariana would probably have been proud of him for thinking it up, if she weren't on the receiving end.

He spent a few minutes meditating, trying to get himself into character, then headed for the subway station.

It wasn't that far, but before long, Collin's back started to hurt from doing Barton's funny walk. The pain and stiffness reminded him of how scrunched up Barton was in the trunk of the car, and he wondered if it hurt after you were dead.

Collin stopped, chills running up and down his spine. What if Barton wasn't really

dead? He wasn't a doctor or anything—actually, most of his medical training came from watching *General Hospital*—and there could have been some signs of life he missed. It could be like those people who woke up in the middle of their funeral and opened the lid of their coffin. What if Barton started knocking on the trunk of the car when the cops pulled Ariana over? His skin started to feel cold and clammy and he began to walk a little slower.

The subway was quiet and cool and empty this time of day. Collin tried to check his appearance in the reflection of the window of the token booth as he went past, but it was too dark to see anything.

There weren't any trains, so he had time to think about what he was doing. He was a good actor, but pretending to be Barton was giving him the creeps. He began to shiver in the semi-dark coolness of the station. Finally, he realized what the problem was—he was too deeply in character. He wasn't doing Barton at all—he was doing Barton in the trunk of the car. The stiff-legged walk, the cold skin, and the absence of a reflection in the mirror all reminded him of scary late-night movies. He couldn't remember whether it was zombies or vampires who acted like that, but

the general idea was enough to scare him.

He felt the hair rise at the back of his neck, and he began to gasp for air, struggling to get out of his Barton persona in a hurry. He fled the station and raced back to the apartment.

Now he was sorry he'd given up the car. He couldn't get the picture of Barton knocking on the trunk lid out of his mind, and he was anxious to get to the airport. He schlepped his suitcase out to the sidewalk hurriedly and raced to the corner for a taxi, stopping briefly at the Korean fruit stand for a newspaper to read on the way.

His eye was caught by the front page of the *New York Post*. A wedding picture of Ariana and Dr. Montgomery? What was that doing there? He felt suddenly disoriented.

He heard some abrupt words in Korean, or maybe Korean-accented English, and looked up. The man was holding out his hand. Collin stared at him blankly for a moment, then caught on and reached into his pocket for the thirty-five cents.

He paid the man and rushed out blindly to hail a taxi. He unfortunately got a driver with a nonstop mouth, but being a fairly good actor, he managed to keep one eye on the paper without rustling it while pretending to be hanging on the cabbie's every word. Neverthe-

less, he didn't really get the gist of what was going on until he got to the airport.

While he stood in line waiting to check in at the airline ticket counter, he reread the story, trying hard to concentrate.

Quick flashes jumped off the page at him, making his skin crawl: Ariana and Dr. Montgomery married for two months... Porphyria Foundation scam... body in the closet... five million dollar ripoff of wealthy contributors... catching plane to Rio... body in the trunk of the car... **BODY IN THE TRUNK OF THE CAR!** It hopped off the page and floated around on his retinas for a while. He blinked.

This changed things, and not for the better. How could he have been so stupid? Collin had some heavy thinking to do. He knew Ariana real well. She wasn't the kind of woman to take a fall for anyone. She had probably already given his name to the cops... all of his names. And Ethel the flake... the pushy guy who wanted the apartment so bad... all those

others who could identify him. He was in deep trouble.

He decided to get out of line, try to get a reservation under another name on another airline to another destination.

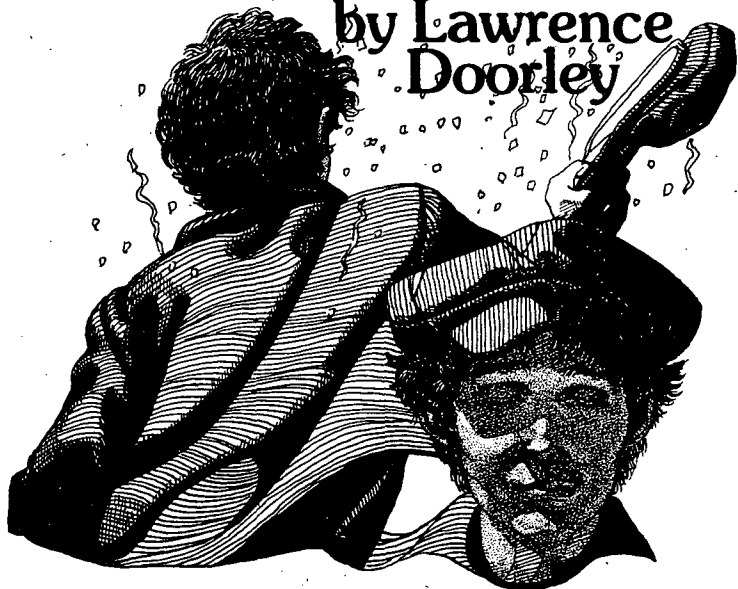
As he stooped down to hook the handle of his suitcase, he saw a large shadow over him. He looked up. A tall blond man in a black suit and cape, with fake Halloween fangs in his mouth and a sardonic look in his eyes, accompanied by a rumpled brown-checked suit lost in a swirl of cigar smoke, surrounded him. More or less.

The blond raised his arms slowly over his head, allowing the detective's shield in his hand to fall open. He had shined his badge to a high gloss. As Collin squinted against the reflection, Hrudic said in his best imitation of a Transylvanian accent, "Ju arrrrre underrr arrest for the murrder of Emanuel Barton. Ju have the rrrright to rrrremain silent..."

In the background, Flaherty tried to keep one eye on the suspect so he didn't flee while Flaherty pretended to be somewhere—anywhere—else.

Off and Running, Or, Bob Swillet's Luck (Bad)

by Lawrence
Doorley



Maybe you missed it. It was in the *News*, page three (BRAVE ORPHAN PERFORMS DOUBLE HEROICS IN CENTRAL PARK; SUBSTANTIAL REWARDS IN OFF-ING). Shades of Horatio Alger, of gas lights and horse-drawn street-cars, of *Luck and Pluck*, of America, the Land of Opportunity.

Unfortunately, the *News* reporter missed the real story. Here is the whole sad tale (*Woe and Rue, Or, It Ain't Necessarily So*).

If Bob Swillet had been someone that Horatio Alger made up, a fictitious person, he would have possessed all the necessary qualities—poverty, self-reliance, determination, up-and-at-'emness—that the real Bob Swillet possessed. Horatio could have titled Bob's story *Bob Swillet, Ball of Fire, Or, An Orphan's Odyssey*.

Early in the going young Swillet would have rescued the lovely eighteen-year-old daughter of a Pittsburgh Nut and Bolt tycoon

from a foul-smelling plug-ugly, and the grateful father of the doe-eyed damsel would have rewarded young Swillet with a clerkship in the New York nut and bolt sales office. From then on it would have been Up The Ladder until The End where Bob Swillet dedicates his Newsboys Orphanage in the last paragraph. Then . . . "Bob Swillet, an old man now, in his late fifties, gazed at the eager faces of the brave little chaps who were devouring the sumptuous repast and a mist formed in his eyes as he thought, How I envy you fortunate young orphans. Just beginning the climb from the depths of adversity to the pinnacle of success. Oh to be an urchin again, a homeless hobbledohoy, in ragged raiment . . . ah, those were the dear days."

That's the way Horatio Alger would have handled Bob Swillet had Bob been a Horatio Alger hero. Life handled Bob Swillet differently.

Horatio Alger's "rags to riches" theme had an enormous influence on late nineteenth and early twentieth century youth. He wrote one hundred ten books. The titles speak for themselves: *Ragged Dick*; *Tattered Tom*; *Struggling Upward, Or, Luke Larkin's Luck*; *Tom the Bootblack*; *Phil the Fiddler*; *Slow and Sure*; *Strong and Steady*; *Fame and Fortune*.

The typical hero is thirteen years old as the story opens. He is either a total orphan (his parents are disposed of in a few opening sentences) or he has a widowed mother (she is seldom more than thirty years old). By page nine the kid heads for Lower Broadway, New York City—that's where the action is. He is a go-getter, willing and eager to attack the most menial work for starvation wages. Evenings, in a freezing garret, are spent in study, preparing for the big chance.

In those days disreputable characters lurked—footpads, bullies, Dick Turpins, filchers, pickpockets, sneak-thieves, plus a better class of unprincipled villains such as rich wastrels, crooked lawyers, flash gentry, embezzlers, swindlers. Our young hero encounters a host of these rascals and, early on, is fleeced of his hard-earned money. He profits from these experiences and continues upward.

By page twenty-two or twenty-three—no later than page thirty—Luck shows up. Our hero performs an heroic feat. Back then the cobblestoned streets of New York were abustle with runaway steeds. Half the time the rampaging horse is about to run over a chubby little tot who has toddled out into the teeming street while his nursemaid is making goo-goo eyes at the handsome Irish

cop (Terence O'Hullivan). The rest of the time there is an hysterical golden-haired heiress in a runaway buggy, or the same heiress being set upon by a pickpurse, or the same idiotic young lady (you'd think she'd have learned her lesson by now) cornered by a slimy gang of strolling riffraff (she has taken a wrong turn and ended up in a filthy alley). In all cases our hero races to the rescue. The grateful father rewards our hero with a clerkship in the brokerage house where our sharp-eyed chap soon locates the inevitable defalcater (a trusted oldtimer in his dotage, forty-five, forty-six, who has fallen prey to evil women).

It is easy going after that. To the top. All giddy golden-haired heiresses are fascinated with Horatio Alger heroes. They break their engagements to snobbish rich playboys and marry our hero. Everyone—the good, that is—lives happily ever after.

Alas, would it were so with Bob Swillet, real person, confronted with real-life ebb and flow. Bob did get an early break, being orphaned at age six when his dear father, a third floor wortman at Stotlemeyer's Brewery in Hoboken, slipped on a loose wort and went flying into the huge copper brewing kettle where he quickly sank from sight. (After the chaps dredged their drowned comrade from the kettle, two of the more belligerent fellows approached Old Man Stotlemeyer and asked that he allow them to dump the batch into the sewer out of respect for their departed fellow worker. Parsimonious Stotlemeyer chased them out of his office with a chair leg.)

Naturally, young Widow Swillet felt bad, losing her husband. But she had backbone. She showed her true mettle by taking in washing, hiring out at the sweatshop, a lacy-blouse factory down by the waterfront (vile hangers-on flung suggestive remarks in her direction—really, since Alger was a real prude, nothing a nowadays girl wouldn't relish), and scrubbing the floor at Gottlieb's Butcher Shop every night (tight-fisted Gottlieb paid her in soup bones and moldy baloney). In her spare time Widow Swillet made cute little cucumber, squash, and eggplant dolls for the rich children on Regal Row. Brave little Bob did his part by hawking early morning newspapers in the busy Erie Lackawanna Railroad Station ("All aboard for Allentown, Scranton, Binghamton, Syracuse, the Anthracite Special, departing on Track 12, ALL ABOARD!"), by delivering the washing in his little red wagon (made with parts the rich kids had thrown away), and by picking up rags, empty bottles, bits of scrap iron which he sold to Izzy the Junkman, who regularly cheated the gullible little waif.

All went well for a while as it sometimes does in the real world.

Things looked good for the Swillets, mother and son. There was even the possibility that a handsome fish peddler ("Today's special, halibut, five cents a pound, get your fresh fish today!") would, after a suitable period of mourning, pop the question. Widow Swillet had regained the bloom in her cheeks and the mischievous twinkle in her pretty brown eyes.

Alas. It was not to be. Fate had other things in mind for the poor widow, the hardworking young widow. Too hardworking, for, bone-tired from her hectic schedule, the poor woman, hastening from five o'clock morning mass at St. Nicholas of Myra (patron saint of brewery workers), not wanting to miss the lacy-blouse factory trolley, slipped on the icy church steps and that was that.

Only tearful Bob and grumpy old Gottlieb the butcher showed up for the funeral on a cold, miserable day. Two days after the funeral the First National Benevolent Loan Association of Hoboken foreclosed on the little Swillet hovel—the mortgage was down to \$87.95. It was done with extreme regret but a contract is a contract and the Widow Swillet had failed to make the regular monthly payment of \$18.25 (it had been her practice to rush down to the loan company during her fifteen minute lunch break at the lacy-blouse factory) on the very day she went to her eternal reward.

A complete orphan now, just as if he had been invented by Horatio Alger, young Bob Swillet was forced to quit school only a few months before the end of the seventh grade. Mother Superior Lydia understood. It was God's will. *He* knew best. She hoped and prayed that Bob would not allow this temporary setback to alter his determination to lead a good, clean life on his way to the top.

"For, Bob," the sainted nun said, "as I have told you time and again, you have all the sterling attributes a boy needs to overcome whatever obstacles the world and the devil may fling in his path. Don't stumble, Bob, don't stumble."

Sniffing, but manfully holding back the tears, Bob promised to do his level best, and he thanked her for never once having beaten him over the knuckles with the glass end of her two and a half pound ruler as she had so often beaten the other boys. This caused the starched creature to beam beatifically and she impulsively pried and tugged at her habit and came forth with a set of brown scapulars which she handed to him as a going away present. Bob was overwhelmed.

That afternoon, after school was out, five or six altar boys beckoned to Bob from behind the statue of St. Nicholas of Myra (which stood in a far corner of the playground and depicted the holy person

as fat, jolly, and apparently on the verge of burping). Stupid Bob, who was well aware that his fellow altar boys despised him as Mother Superior's pet, said to himself, How kind of them. I have misjudged them and shall have to confess to Father O'Dooleygan this Saturday at my regular weekly confession. Bob figured the chaps were planning to shake his hand and wish him well. He was wrong.

So it was with fond memories of better days plus welts, bruises, sore ribs, and one black eye that Bob Swillet bid a sad adieu to schooldays at St. Nicholas of Myra. That was in January, 1926. He was thirteen years old.

Bob's faith in mankind was immediately restored that very evening when Old Man Gottlieb offered the homeless orphan free lodging above the butcher shop—a drafty, roach-ridden, windowless garret room once occupied by a goat herdsman. In return for the free lodging, crusty old Gottlieb expected Bob to scrub the butcher shop floor every night. In no time at all the customers were complimenting Gottlieb on his spotless shop (Bob always did things up right).

Enter Fate.

In addition to his nightly duties at Gottlieb's, Bob put in a full day's work as newsboy, Western Union messenger, bootblack, rags, bottles, and scrap iron scavenger, and—there was no holding Bob back—as a squeaky-voiced singer of melancholy Irish ballads on a busy street corner during evening rush hour. "I'll take you home again, Kathleen . . ."

It was tough going, but one blizzard night in early February Bob, staggering home from his full day's work, was blown into the Hoboken Free Public Library and his life was never the same. He discovered Horatio Alger's *Whetstone Phil, Or, Sharp and Sure*, a tattered copy someone had left on a table.

Enthralled, lost in time, young Bob was finally brought back to earth through the persistent efforts of Miss Minnie Watson, the spinster librarian, who kept tapping him on his tousled head—it was after closing time—first with her overshoe and then with a lead pipe that her old mother had given her long ago as a weapon against nocturnal footpads and saloon corner ruffians.

By the time a reluctant spring came back to Hoboken around April tenth, Bob Swillet had devoured every Horatio Alger novel in sight, and he gradually came to the joyous realization that he, Bob Swillet, was one lucky boy. For he pos-

sessed all the wonderful disadvantages of the basic Alger hero. He became inspired, jubilant, wild with excitement. He now knew that God was at the helm, in charge, looking out for orphans.

So it was, that late spring of 1926, before falling into bed around midnight every night, Bob Swillet said a prayer of thanks to St. Jerome Aemillian whom Miss Watson the librarian—she had grown to admire the thin waif—had looked up in the book of saints. She had suggested that since St. Jerome Aemillian was the patron saint of orphans it wouldn't hurt to have the old boy on Bob's side.

It worked. Prayers always do. St. Jerome, coming to Bob in a dream one night, had the following suggestion:

"Get the hell out of Hoboken. It just isn't good orphan territory. Try McKeesport, Pennsylvania; Pittsburgh; Buffalo; or the Big Town. Go where tycoons and magnates and their nincompoopish daughters abound. Get off your lazy ***** (deleted) and get moving."

It was only a five cent ferry ride to the Big Town, so Bob figured he'd give it a try before going to McKeesport, which must be, he thought, somewhere in Indian Territory. Two weeks after St. Jerome had answered his prayer young Bob, thirteen years old, was hired at seven dollars a week as office boy ("plus other duties") at the up and coming Wall Street law firm of Higgins, Halliburton, Whitehurst and Sweetcove in answer to their ad for "an ambitious young fellow, not afraid of hard work." He was on his way. Look out there at the top of the ladder, here comes Swillet. He clicked his heels in sheer bliss. How lucky I am, he gloated.

Seething, churning, afire with joy and wonderment, he quickly found comfortable quarters—for eighty-five cents a week and some janitorial duties—above a waterfront mission for derelicts within eight blocks of his work. He rushed back to Hoboken. Gathered up his meager belongings. Ran into the butcher shop to say goodbye to his benefactor, Gottlieb, tell him the great news. Gottlieb, understandably disturbed at losing his ball-of-fire woefully underpaid employee, reacted as might be expected. He pummelled poor bewildered Bob Swillet over the head with a good-sized chunk of pork loin.

Out in the street, holding his poor throbbing head, Bob could only go "tish-tish, my oh my, I'll be darned," thinking, I'll never understand human nature. One minute it's all kindness and good fellowship and the next it's thwacking behind the playground statue or a pork loin thumping; dear me.

That's all right, Bob. These things are all part of growing up.

Like people always say, someday you'll look back on those little pummels and laugh heartily; ho, ho, ho. Anyway, up and at 'em! Full speed ahead! Here comes Swillet!

"That lad will go far," many a prominent banker, stockbroker, attorney was heard to remark that summer and fall of 1926 as Bob came barrelling around a corner in the financial district, hellbent on some vital mission, toppling an occasional little old lady (word had gotten around and most little old ladies managed to scrounge up against the side of a building as Bob sped by). Every time he knocked a little old lady head over heels he paused momentarily to tip his cap and then sped onward, smoke pouring from his flying heels.

In August of 1927 Bob Swillet became fourteen years old, a bit long in the tooth for the average Horatio Alger hero. He was still stuck on the bottom rung of the ladder, still putting in a busy twelve hour day at the law firm and then another three or four hours of sweeping, scrubbing, and disinfecting at the derelicts' mission. Busy as he was, the poor lad had little time to eat properly, and while he continued to grow taller he remained a skinny, spindle-shanked, skin and bones creature with large brown eyes, unruly black hair, a jumpy, jerky twitchiness that gave him a kind of Jack-in-the-box appearance. The poor boy was worried.

He was justified in worrying. For, having read and reread Horatio Alger, he was aware that things weren't working out. Where were happenstance, Lady Luck, the big break? Where was the large manila envelope in the gutter? Where was the footpad attempting to brutally wrench the valuable necklace from the swanlike neck of the Horseshoe heiress? Where was the howling kid—scion of old money—about to be trampled under the flying hooves? And that old standby, the runaway carriage, the shrieking Thimble and Notions heiress? Where indeed. Things looked mighty uncertain for Bob Swillet that August of 1927.

But suddenly it all seemed to straighten out. Mr. Higgins called him upstairs to say that they all had their eye on him. Keep up the good work, Swillet. Oh, by the way, we are raising your wages. From now on you'll be earning eight dollars and fifty cents a week. Poor dear Bob, weak from hunger anyway, nearly fainted from gratitude. More good news awaited him when he approached his miserable little room above the mission that night. He didn't reach his room, for the mission had burned down. Two or three derelicts were lost, as were all of Bob's possessions—two shoeboxes which

contained his burlesque queen photos—but he was now free to seek new lodgings with no strings attached. He was finished with trying to handle two jobs. Besides, he needed time for his law studies: his dollar fifty raise would enable him to apply for admission to the WorldWide International Law and Jurisprudence Correspondence College of Cedar Rapids, Iowa. And he yearned for free time over the weekends to spend in Central Park where so many of Alger's heroes—Blackie the Chimneysweep, Will Wiggins, Tinker Boy, Hobnail Harry, a whole slew of lucky urchins—had hit the jackpot by:

(1) Rushing out into the bridle path and stopping the runaway steed (two eight-year-old guttersnipes from Hell's Kitchen had thrown a large firecracker from the boscage into the terrified steed's path). Blackie, Will, Hobnail—thirty or forty other lucky chaps—had all been handsomely rewarded for having saved the rich maiden's life, with Hobnail getting the best deal, an immediate partnership in the Acme Deluxe Parlor Organ Company (\$27.45 F. O. B. Elkhart, Indiana) plus the right to spark the shy maiden.

(2) Leaping from a park bench and grabbing the careening perambulator as it approached the Conservatory Pond and the end of the line for the howling tot (Oswald Wellington Clamfellow IV, Clothespin heir). Stovepipe Steve, Bogboy Bill, The Erie Train Boy (a newspapers, magazine, candy salesboy on the Jersey Central), numerous others, sprang to the perambulator rescue and each was also handsomely rewarded.

Young Bob Swillet desperately desired to get in on that kind of quick leap upward. Now he could. His weekends were free (he studied law at night). In new quarters, a dollar a week, over a second-hand bookshop in Greenwich Village, embarked on his law studies, making headway at the law firm, he was at last ready to roll.

Again the seasons waxed and waned. Came and went. Sang their brief song and then vanished. Oh, wortmen still fell into vats, widows slipped on icy church steps, and spindly orphans yelled, "Hextrey, hextrey, read hall 'bout hit. . . Milwaukee Butter en Egg typhoon found dead in love nest on 38th Street, hextrey," but life was pretty good for Bob Swillet.

Alas (again; too bad, but this is a true story and we cannot eliminate all alases—that's the way life is, a hi-ho the merry-o today, an alas tomorrow), it was not to endure. The market crashed in late October, 1929. Mr. Higgins, Bob's mentor—"we have our eye on you, Swillet"—abruptly departed via a window in his fif-

teenth floor office. Mr. Halliburton took charge.

"Have Swillet sweep up the glass and mop up the blood," he ordered. A fawning flunky rushed downstairs to the mail room where Swillet was busily stamping the outgoing mail with his left hand while industriously scrubbing the ten gallon coffee urn with his right hand.

Two months later—less than that actually, it was only a few days after a somewhat sober Christmas party—Mr. Halliburton, a dapper bachelor, also departed, taking with him a little over sixty-seven point five percent of the firm's cash and one hundred percent of vivacious Mrs. (Liz) Sweetcove, wife of Mr. ("Cities Service will go to 300, mark my words") Sweetcove.

This came as a shock to everyone, especially to Mr. Sweetcove, who brooded for a week or ten days and then he, too, left, leaving behind a cryptic note to the effect that he was renouncing the world and was departing on the morrow for Kentucky to join a silent-monk monastery. Good God, his associates gasped, what next?

That left only Mr. Whitehurst and very little cash. Bob Swillet worried. And every night he prayed to a trio of saints who looked after lawyers, St. Ivo, St. James, St. John Bosco. Please take care of Mr. Whitehurst, he begged, please. No use. It seemed to be fate. Nothing the saints could do, the verdict was a foregone conclusion. You win some, you lose some. Mr. Whitehurst lost the big one on a lovely lazy summer afternoon in 1930 on Long Island Sound when the boom of his sailing vessel . . . well, naturally the firm collapsed.

Staggering home in the brooding twilight of the day the firm closed, Bob Swillet was in such a deep daze that he failed to see the huge manila envelope right in front of him, on the sidewalk, forget the gutter. He actually nearly tripped over it. Thirty seconds later a sharpeyed newsboy—a skinny orphan from Jersey City—scooped it up and the very next morning he returned it to the offices of J. P. Morgan and Co. and was given an immediate reward of five dollars plus a solemn promise of a scholarship to Harvard Law School when he was old enough, a fair exchange for having returned only seven hundred eighty-seven thousand dollars in fifty and hundred dollar bills. It paid to be honest.

More bad news awaited Bob at home. Another large envelope. This one from the mail order law college in Cedar Rapids. Thank God, the poor fellow thought jubilantly as he frantically opened the envelope. My diploma at last (he had been anxiously awaiting his sheepskin since mailing in his final exam (Mrs. Hyatt Wyatt III versus Farmer Ezra Brown, a suit in Contracts, a matter of foul

eggs). Bob had found for Mrs. Wyatt III, who had contracted with Farmer Brown for two dozen white eggs a week at twelve cents a dozen. Mrs. Wyatt III's complaint was that Farmer Brown was sneaking too many brown eggs into the weekly basket.

Alas, there was no diploma. Merely a brief announcement stating that the school could no longer issue law degrees under orders from the U.S. Attorney General (Harvard, Columbia, Cornell, Michigan had complained that the Cedar Rapids institution was making a mockery of the law).

Poor Bob Swillet, one blow after another. He moaned and whimpered for about a week after his double setbacks but, since he had spunk and a firm belief in Horatio Alger, he didn't quit. With a hideous Depression gripping the land, millions out of work, he managed to get a job at three seventy-five a week as night janitor of a twenty-seven story office building in Wall Street (he only had to take care of the top twelve stories, a crew of twelve took care of the bottom fifteen floors).

Daytimes he haunted Central Park, still hoping for the lucky bounce. Time passed, the years went by.

WAR.

He was making nine fifty a week and had a helper, a young fellow on his way up, when he was drafted in April, 1941, and spent the war polishing pots and pans all over the wide world. He was the very last G. I. to leave Italy, the army having lost his records. It wasn't until a congressional committee, on an unnecessary jaunt of some kind in July, 1948, accidentally stumbled on him in Palermo, Sicily, where he was cleaning garbage cans and he was finally discharged, honorably.

PEACE.

Back in the States he made haste to report to the office building where he had worked before being drafted. He was given short shrift, the real estate firm handling the building claiming that he had forfeited his right to be rehired by failing to appear when the war ended. His hysterical explanation that the army had lost him, left him stranded in Palermo, was dismissed as "a likely story."

It took the poor fellow nearly a year to get a job. He was finally hired by a large Wall Street law firm at twenty-seven dollars a week as a factotum. He made coffee, ran errands (now, unlike the old days, he deliberately went out of his way to collide with little old ladies, word got around: "Look out for that skinny, mean-looking, chinless factotum," widows on their way to their brokers warned one another), took mail around, took care of thumbtacks,

carbon paper, carried office supplies from the freight elevator to the stock room. He was nothing but a superannuated office boy, and the high-faluting legal secretaries and the snippety little file clerks treated him as if he were a simpleton. He grew increasingly bitter—no wonder—and talked to himself at night in his lonely room above the hardware store.

A terrible blow smote him after the 1957 baseball season. His true love, the Brooklyn Dodgers, left for California. He became an atheist after that and took to drink, three beers a night, five on Saturdays and Sundays. The hell with it, he snarled, it's all a fake. He wrote a scathing letter to Pope Pius XII, demanding ten thousand dollars' damages for his mother's death long ago on the icy steps of St. Nicholas of Myra in Hoboken. There was no answer from His Holiness, busy on a new encyclical.

Finally it was 1978. He was sixty-five, stooped, bald, sarcastic. It was his last day on the job. He was scrubbing the coffee urns when a little snippet from Personnel came around with a small blue and white coffee can.

"How about it, sport?" she said, giving him a swish of her cute hips, a jiggle of her bosom, and a quick little wink from a big brown eye. "How about a contribution?" She rattled the can under his nose.

"What's it for?" demanded Bob Swillet, backing away from the perfumed jezebel.

"Oh, some old fuddy-duddy's retiring," she lisped. "Personnel forgot all about the usual retirement collection until a couple of minutes ago. It's not one of the big shots. Just some small fry. You don't have to go overboard. I'll take a quarter. How about it?"

The hackles rose on Bob Swillet's wrinkled neck. His long face turned chalk white. He grabbed the edge of a table to keep from swooning.

"What's the matter?" the little imp said. "Something wrong? You okay?"

"This . . . this . . . this . . . fuddy-duddy," stammered poor Bob Swillet, once lucky orphan, "does it . . . he . . . have a name?"

"Of course he does," said the painted hussy, giggling nervously—what the hell's the matter with this old bastard? "It's . . . it's . . . wait'll I check the sheet . . . oh yeah, Spillet or Spigot, something like that. Listen, I don't have all day. If you can't afford a quarter, just say so. It doesn't matter."

"I'm the fuddy-duddy who's retiring," hissed Bob Swillet. "The name is Swillet, not Spillet. Now get out of here before . . ."

"Oh my God," the squirt squealed. "Oh God, I'm sorry. . . . Gee, Mr. Spillet . . ."

"SWILLET," snarled Bob Swillet, baring stained teeth.

"Squeak . . . squeak . . ." squeaked the frightened girl, racing from the cramped room, jiggling the coffee can and several parts of her anatomy behind her.

Later Mrs. Craighead, in charge of Personnel—"I'll straighten it out"—came looking for Bob with a check for fifty-five dollars and a fifty cent "You Lucky Dog" retirement card signed by three dozen of his fellow workers. But Bob Swillet was gone.

He was up in Central Park sitting on a bench along the bridle path at the south end of the reservoir. It was summer, deep summer. A half million nursemaids supervised a half million baby buggies full of rich little brats. Squirrels scampered. People fed pigeons. The sky was blue, the breeze warm, it was hardly the time or place for bitter thoughts, thoughts about rat poison in the huge office coffee pot.

"I'll show them, I'll show them," Bob Swillet was muttering, "every one of them. Treating me like dirt under their feet. Didn't even know my name . . . Spillet . . . Spigot . . . 'How about it, sport? Some old fuddy-duddy, some small fry.' Well, enough's enough . . . this is it . . . how dare they? I'll . . ."

There was a faint shrieking sound in the distance. It intruded upon Bob Swillet's vengeful thoughts. The cries grew louder. They were frantic feminine upper-class shrieks. The sound of racing hooves rent the air. For the second time that day the hackles rose on Bob Swillet's neck.

It . . . it . . . it can't be, he thought, leaping from the bench just in case it was. And it was, it really was. Round the bend came the runaway steed, the loose reins flying wildly, the golden-haired beauty in jodhpurs and other plush accoutrements screaming frantically.

Fifty years overdue, but there it was: the foaming steed, spooked by a sixty-year-old female jogger in a purple jogging outfit, the screaming rich girl, the looming doom (a copse of Chinese sycamore trees), the howling towhead in the runaway baby-buggy . . .

The howling towhead?

"My God, my God," gasped Bob Swillet, suddenly aware that he was at long, long last being overwhelmed by Lady Luck. My God . . . the careening perambulator and the runaway horse at one and the same time. Which should it be?

Onward galloped the frothing horse, louder screamed the rich

girl, her arms locked around the horse's neck. Down the long hill sped the baby buggy, the scion of old money mad as hell and giving vent to blood-curdling howls and shrieks. And the nursemaid, suddenly aware that her giggly-gagging with the handsome Irish cop had given the little brat the chance of releasing the hand brake, began to scream to high heaven, the whole park ringing with the wild cacophony of golden-haired beauty, spoiled little brat, horrified nursemaid of buxom consistency.

The cop, a little late, saw the impending disasters and launched himself down the hill with a ringing curse.

What of Bob Swillet? Heart pounding, breath escaping in choking gasps, knees flexed, old muscles taut, left leg raised to stop the speeding buggy, both arms up to leap at the flying reins. What a break, what a wonderful opportunity . . . everything comes to him who waits . . . never give up . . . Quitters Never Win, Winners Never Quit . . . God Bless America.

"Help me . . . help me . . . help me," squealed the golden-haired beauty. "Oh sir . . . help . . . help."

"Bah, bah, howl . . . scream . . . screech . . ." yelled the kid (Bangington Lockstock Hawks-Welps IV, age eighteen months: "God damn it, stop this son of a bitchin' thing . . . somebody's gonna ketch hell . . . wait'll my old man hears 'bout this.")

"NOW . . ." shouted Bob Swillet just as the two runaways reached each other. He almost made it. He came in second. A blur zoomed by him, a blur that scooped up the towhead in one sure leftarmed scoop and used the other arm to grab the loose reins. It was over in a second.

The blur was Ebbie Vaye, a thirteen-year-old six foot four inch orphan from Hoboken who had sneaked away from the group touring the Museum of Natural History, determined to make his way in the Big City. A leaping fool who could dunk a basketball with a foot to spare, Ebbie had never heard of Horatio Alger but some instinct prompted him to grab what looked like two golden opportunities as he saw that the runaway horse and the speeding buggy were approaching simultaneous disaster. For, he thought as he flew through the summer air in heroic vigor, just how many chances do orphans from Hoboken get in this life?

It took quite a while for all of them—the cop, the nursemaid, the female jogger in the purple outfit, a little old lady with a pink parasol, and a Lebanese pretzel pushcar fellow—to subdue the enraged Bob Swillet, who had his hands in frenzied clutch around

Ebbie Vaye's neck. They finally pried him loose and heaved him, still screaming some incomprehensible gibberish about "my turn, my turn, it was my turn," into the paddy wagon, where the bloody old maniac was carted off to Bellevue and never heard from again.

The *News* reporter, who had seen the item on the police blotter, ran down the story. He dismissed Bob Swillet as "probably pot-valiant on cheap wine, a sick old fellow who obviously had never heard of Horatio Alger. Had the deranged derelict read the wonderful, inspiring Alger stories, he would have been well aware that there was no provision for decrepit old has-beens. It was always—and that's the way it should be—the brave, skinny orphan who rescued the Dust Pan and Whisk Broom magnate's lovely daughter or leaped into the breach to stop the runaway buggy containing His Nibs III, spoiled scion of McKeesport Iron and Forge money."

The *News* reporter located Ebbie back at the orphanage where he was being feted by the elated supervisors, who figured they couldn't lose. Ebbie was mulling over two offers. First was a substantial cash reward, a trust fund for future education (probably at UCLA), a new wing on the orphanage. This from the Dust Pan and Whisk Broom tycoon, grateful father of Penelope, sixteen-year-old beauty on the runaway horse.

From the McKeesport Iron and Forge portion of the program had come also an immediate cash reward, an educational trust fund (for an Ivy League school), sole ownership of a brand new NBA franchise either in Miami or Toledo.

"What have you decided, Ebbie?" the reporter asked the six foot four inch thirteen-year-old.

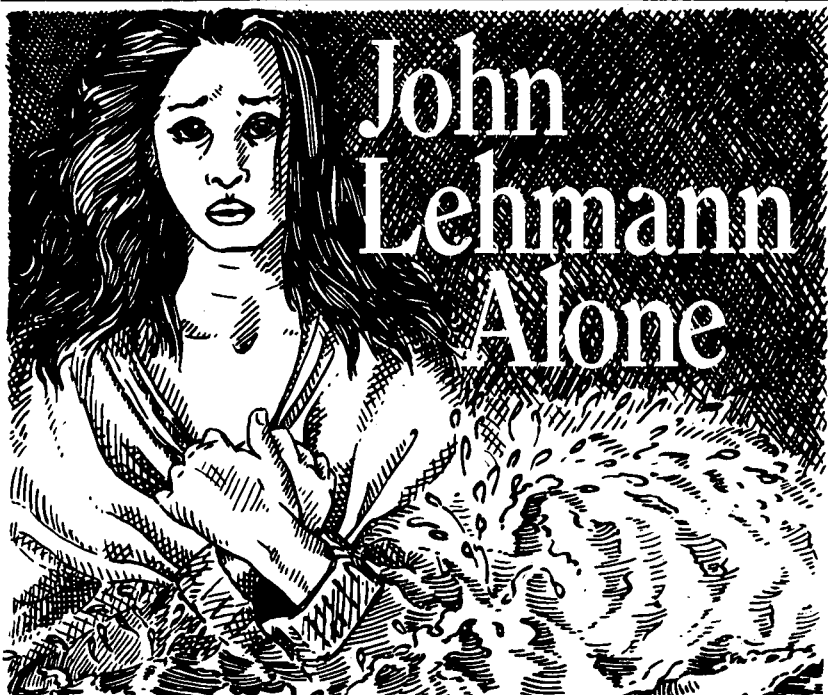
"I'm lettin' my agent handle it," Ebbie said.

"Your agent? You have an agent?"

"Damn tootin' . . . I'm gonna get mine while the gettin's good."

So . . . as Horatio Alger said at the ending of *Struggling Upward*, Or, *Luke Larkin's Luck*, "So closes an eventual passage in the life of Luke Larkin. He had struggled upward from a boyhood of privation and self-denial into a youth and manhood of prosperity and honor. There had been some luck about it, I admit, but after all he is indebted for most of his good fortune to his own good qualities."

That's the old fight, Horatio. TRIED AND TRUE: STRAIGHT AHEAD: RISE AND SHINE: UP BY THE BOOTSTRAPS: TRUE BLUE: THE STARS AND STRIPES FOREVER.



by David Kaufman

I guess I should begin by saying that it's not the easiest thing in the world for me to tell a story. I don't really know much about that sort of business. I never went but to the fourth grade, and even then I didn't hardly care for reading. I did like arithmetic a lot, though. Arithmetic's not like other things. You've got something solid there. You always know what you have with an arithmetic problem.

It's a funny thing to me now, it really is, but I didn't want to do nothing but get out of school and go to work on my daddy's farm. And I was let out early for need.

In those days, you see, you could leave school to help out at home if you were needed bad enough. That was the law then. Well, I couldn't wait, and my daddy *did* need me, so I got to quit school very early in life and go to work for him. It was a happy day for me.

My mother was against it, she wanted me to go on at least to the eighth grade, but I insisted. I figured I knew better. So I finished the fourth grade, as I said, and then I quit.

The only reason I say all of this is because I went to school with John Lehmann. And we been friends for all these years since. That was nearly sixty years ago, so you can see that I knew him for a long time.

What happened to him and to his shouldn't of happened to anybody.

Well, his daddy's farm was right below my daddy's farm, down low in the valley south of Garlock's Bend, and so in time it turned out that his farm was right below mine, they both come down to us by rights. It was good bottom ground. And so wonderful for water because the Susquehanna cut right through it. It even flooded every dozen years or so, and that made the ground around there even better. There was a lot of water. That's important to remember.

I never got married. John, he did, to a wonderful girl from over to Skinner's Eddy, Caroline Jacobs, and they had kids, and time passed like it does for us all. The kids grew up and didn't want to stay around Garlock's Bend so they left and went down to Harrisburg for work. Carrie, his wife, she seemed to not quite care so much about things after that.

Now I always liked Carrie, don't get me wrong about her. I really did. A whole lot more than *liked*. A whole lot more. In my own way, of course. I guess that in the end that's important to remember, too.

Miller's Store, where all this sort of comes to a head, you'll have to understand about. It's kind of the place in Garlock's Bend where everybody goes. You can buy groceries there, and you can buy clothes there. And tools. And even light meals. You get so you don't have to leave town very often. It's an honest-to-goodness general store, in the middle of town right down along the river. I knowed it through four owners ever since the building was put up. And my daddy was one of the men who helped to do that. The current owner, Bill Miller, bought the store off his second cousin, Henry, who decided to retire pretty nearly thirty years ago now, and he's run it ever since.

Generally it's open by eight, only hardly nobody would ever be in there that early but Bill, fussing around with boxes and cans on the shelves, keeping things all straightened up. Not hardly ever anyone else, though. Not much happens early in Garlock's Bend.

It's a town used to slow starts. But the people of the town and the hills around, too, consider Miller's to be something of a meeting hall, so it is almost always open. Later in the morning there's lots of them comes in. The talk is just plain satisfactory. And the coffee is special. So it's not at all unusual at ten or eleven in the morning to see a fistful of men stuffed into orange hunting jackets all clustered around the homemade wooden tables, elbows on red-checked tablecloths, sipping hot coffee rich with cream and sugar. Listening to young Dale Heberlein, the morning disk jockey from over at Towanda. Every one of them men laughing at Dale's humor. With maybe a bought doughnut or some eggs and home fries, all peppered up. Add the smell of that coffee, maybe even some hand cut bacon, and it's as good a way to start the day as there is.

Well, that's Miller's for you. That's where things started to go haywire.

Funny thing is, even though I lived so close to John Lehmann, I got to talk to him mostly there at Miller's. At home, right next to him, it was all farm business until the evenings. And then he had his family to attend to, with very little time at all to jawbone with me. I was alone, and like as not off doing things myself, chasing around, so mostly I saw and talked to him after growing season in the late mornings at Miller's, and I sometimes think he wouldn't of come there even then but for my sake, to befriend me and spend even just a little time with me. I always appreciated that.

I now and again think he knew, too, how very much I cared for Carrie down through the years. Maybe better than she did. But I never said a single word of it to either of them or to a person alive. I just never would have done that.

Over the seasons I sure liked the mornings I spent with him at Miller's, but I especially liked those last few times. We used to sit and talk and drink that coffee. God, how I remember that!

It makes the loss of him all the more painful.

Some things, I guess, you'd end up going mad if you tried to keep inside of you. Just completely mad. And so I guess the best thing is to just tell the story, no matter how painful, to say what happened, get it out in the open finally and maybe get a handle on it. I have to admit, though, that John Lehmann's story has me licked, and more than that—it's got me scared, too.

Well, there isn't a whole lot happening on a small farm in late October, except maybe finishing up your apples, and getting the ground ready for next year, that sort of thing, so for a couple of

weeks this particular October I had been going just as regular as anything to Miller's for breakfast and for talk. Mostly it was just to pass time.

For the first of those weeks John and Carrie occasionally came in too, and we had some good mornings together. All the usual stuff, bragging about farming and hunting, and me teasing Carrie and finagling an invitation for a supper from her soon.

Carrie Lehmann, I've got to tell you, was the gentlest, kindest, most friendly woman I ever knew. That's a certain thing. And it's not the most important thing in the world, but she had such beautiful light blue eyes. Those last times I saw her over there at Miller's are dear times to me yet. They seem now to me to be a kind of adding up of all the earlier times I was ever around her. Sort of like they were the real times and all the ones before were dreams. I don't know. I guess I can't say it exactly like I mean it.

Then they began not to come to Miller's so often. Winter wasn't so very far off and we had a cold snap, and I guessed maybe it just was easier for them to stay home when that cold spell set in. There wasn't anything too unusual in that.

But then there was that last time I saw Carrie. It had rained hard on and off for about a week. It was cold and damp and all the water had pushed up the Susquehanna until it was as high as it's ever been. I mean, it was *high*. And there we were in Miller's, just like always.

But this particular time there was something really different about Carrie. I could see that right away. She hardly touched her coffee at all, hardly touched it at all, and she wouldn't talk about any of the usual things no matter how we tried to get her to. And she fussed and fretted.

"We've got to go back, John," she said. "It's time to go back home."

Well, they had just come. I didn't know quite what to think of that one, they had really just arrived not ten minutes before. And she seemed so nervous and so far away in her head when she talked. So I just stayed out of it.

"John, the water's getting so high," she pleaded. "I'm sure it's nearly high enough. We had better go back. It's not safe to be anywhere away from home when the water's this high." Her old blue eyes were glistening as she said, "It'll be right up next to the house," she said quietly. "It'll be high enough for it to . . ." She caught herself and looked down.

God, but she did seem scared of something.

John, he just sort of looked at her, like he didn't know quite what to say either. And then he looked away. He tried to keep a little conversation going with me, but you could see how helpless and embarrassed he was.

Carrie, she got real quiet, and she just sort of kept looking at John pleadingly. When she did finally talk again she just mumbled, and it was about the high water, how dangerous that was, and how easy it would be to break through. And how they better get home to keep everything safe. How she was scared bad for the both of them. And crazy things like that. All in sort of low and broken sentences.

But I sure was feeling badly for John, and I was scared for Carrie. There was something wrong with her, all right. She wasn't acting normal, not for her nor for anyone else, talking like that. She seemed so scared because of the rain and the water rising in the river.

John, he ended up putting his arm around her and leading her quietly out of Miller's. And he bent over and kissed her head lightly once as he did. I was really touched by that display of love, him being so matter-of-fact and all. He never even looked back.

Well, John did come alone a few times more to Miller's, but he seemed distant somehow. He just sat there, quiet. He never brought up Carrie, and he wouldn't answer any questions about her when someone else did. And then he always just left, like he had decided it was a bad idea to come in the first place. And he did that pretty nearly always right away.

We never did get to see Carrie no more. No sir, I never saw her alive after that last day.

There was something strange in the air. I just had this funny feeling. You know how a person can get.

For instance, I used to sit out on the porch in the evenings, no matter how cool it got—I like the cold weather—and I could see over to John's farm. Towards the end I noticed that there was only a kitchen light on, never one upstairs. Never. And once when I wasn't sleeping good I looked out my window at about three in the morning and that light was still on. Now, no farmer stays up like that. It just is never done.

Then John stopped coming to the store.

Well, one thing led to another, and I got to thinking that something had gone sour over next door. I figured Carrie was real sick, or something like that. Hell, we were all old. And I decided to go over and see them and ask if I could help. Now, that may seem

like the most normal thing in the world to most everybody, but you must understand this, around Garlock's Bend a piece of interference like that is very serious business, because we tend not to trouble each other, not even to visit without first being asked. We respect each other and let each other alone. It's just that we keep this feeling of distance, sort of.

Well, finally I couldn't help it. I couldn't have stayed away any longer even if I wanted to, and so I went over late one Saturday evening and knocked on John Lehmann's door. There was no answer. That didn't ring true to me, I knew better, and soon I was pounding hard on his door.

I was shocked when John finally opened it just a little. I could see into the room to his kitchen table. It was all cluttered with dirty dishes and spoiled food. There was more used dishes in the sink. And the whole kitchen just looked absolutely filthy. John, too, had a kind of a wild, dirty look. His hair was going every which way, and he needed a shave. He looked like he was real confused.

He stood with the door opened only a little ways, kind of peeking out, like he was afraid I would try to come in. Right away then I knew something was wrong, because friends don't do that to each other. He was shaking his head back and forth slowly, and already starting to close the door, almost as if he didn't know me. "I'm forbidden to let anyone in," he said. His voice was weak and full of fear. "I'm just not allowed to."

"John," I said. "You got to let me in." Something was very wrong. "I'd like to talk to you, John," I said. "John? Let me in." I started to push on the door, but he got it closed before I could do anything. And then the kitchen light went out and the whole house was dark.

I just stood there for a minute or more, collecting myself. I was really scared. Well sir, next thing I did, I went all around the house and peeked in every window that I could, only I couldn't see anything because all the lights was out. I tried to pull up on every window, but they were all locked. And then I tried all three doors and the cellar door, too, but I got nowhere.

It was as if no one had lived in the house for years, it was shut up so tight. I stood there in the dark, with just the silence and a little night wind blowing ever so easy.

The river was really coming up, rising up the slope in back of the house. It made an eerie slurping sound in the dark, sliding along heavy like it did.

My stomach was rolling with pain, and I was sweating, no matter the cold. I was really scared that something terrible had happened

to Carrie and John. What it was I didn't even want to guess.

I didn't see any movement over at John's all the next day or that night either. I thought about it off and on all day and decided against saying anything to anyone else just yet. Actually, it really wasn't none of my business. And for all I knew, everything was like it always was with the both of them.

The next afternoon, then, I spied John out back going into his milkhouse. He was carrying a box of something that looked real heavy. Well, to me that was as good a time as any. I figured to go on over and talk to him while he was still in the milkhouse, maybe even block his way and keep him in there until he told me what was going on.

When I got to the doorway I could see him taking quarts of peaches from the box and letting them down easy into the water to cool them. He looked up at me as I stood there, for I blocked the light from outside, you see. He did not smile at me.

"Carrie always liked her peaches," he said finally. He was cleaned up pretty good this time. He nodded. "And I do, too." He shook his head carefully. "Got lots of them." He reached me a quart. "You want to take one home?" Except that he didn't seem too happy, it was almost as if it was the most normal day in the world to him. Just like nothing was unusual. I could hardly believe it.

"Look here," I said, and I was trying to hold down both my Dutch temper and all my fears. "Just what is going on, John? Just what the hell is going on with you?"

"There ain't nothing going on," he said slowly, eyeing me carefully. I felt really awkward. It was *his* farm and all. I didn't want him thinking I didn't trust him. If you don't trust a man, you got nothing good between you and him ever again. I didn't want that to happen.

But I waited just a moment and then I decided to take the chance. "Where's Carrie?" I asked.

He stood there quietly for a little bit, looking me over. And then I guess he decided I had the right. "In the house," he said. "She's been bad sick. Real bad." He put the last of the peaches into the trough. "Well," he said quietly, "you know how it is. Ain't none of us getting any younger." He tried a smile that didn't quite work. "Ain't that right?"

"Maybe somebody ought to come in," I said. "Give you a hand. Lots of us would be proud to."

"I don't need no hand," he said. "I don't want no one helping."

"Maybe Carrie needs a doctor," I tried.

"No doctor," he said. "Ain't no doctor can help Carrie now." Just as matter of fact as that.

"Well," I said, "I could do something." I said it as slowly and as clearly as I could. "Somebody should be helping you out."

He dropped the empty box onto the floor. "I don't want no help," he said. "I don't want nothing from nobody." He almost seemed angry or something.

I looked at him for a long time. But there was nothing to see in his face.

"Okay," I said, after what seemed like a couple of minutes of him staring at me and me at him. "If that's how you want it, John."

"That's how I want it."

"You know I consider you my friend."

"I know that," he said.

Well, there it is. That was the whole of our conversation that day. I shrugged my shoulders and left. I looked back once and saw him still standing in the doorway of the milkhouse, glaring out at me. And when he turned around I left and didn't look back no more.

Now when you go over all this you have to remember that we are an isolated and a rural people, as I said, and we have our ways. If he wanted to be all by himself to take care of Carrie until she died, if that was what was happening to her, who was I or who was anyone, to stop him. May seem odd, but that's how people our way are. We take care of our own. We mind our own beeswax. And if we don't want no help, why, that is our concern entirely. I guess I understood that in him. I didn't like it, but I understood it.

The idea of Carrie being on her way to dying just almost destroyed me is all. The thought of never even getting to see her again. That was an awful thing to think about. It wasn't till a couple of days later, after going over and over it in my head, that I got the first feelings that maybe there was more still, maybe John was not telling me the full truth. Just all of a sudden I had that thought. And then I couldn't get it out of my mind.

But it was obvious to me that he was nervous and frightened and not acting like himself at all. So I concluded that maybe the idea of him holding back wasn't so farfetched.

Maybe Carrie wasn't just sick.

Maybe it was far worse than that. *Something* was making him act peculiar. And I sure did want to find out what that was.

I sat on my porch swing that evening, kicking the swing easy and watching John's place. I felt sneaky and miserable doing it,

like I was some kind of a spy, but I just kept on staring over there. And as it started to get dark, only his kitchen light was on, just like always.

Sometimes when a thing's going wrong, a body gets to having a compulsion. It just takes hold of him, and he can't help but do the first thing that occurs to him. He's just got to.

Well, that was what happened to me. All of a sudden I couldn't sit still no more. I figured to go on over to John's house and get inside somehow and see what was going on. Whether he wanted me to or not. Trust or not. I had to see if Carrie was still alive, see if she was sick, see what was up. Anything would be better than sitting on that old swing and looking at his kitchen light and wondering.

I moved down off my porch and started towards his house. My stomach had begun to churn with fear, although to be truthful I don't know even yet exactly what I was afraid of. Maybe just of what I was about to do. Handy to his house I began to slow up. My upper lip got to feeling cold and clammy. And the closer I came to the bright light of John's kitchen, the darker everything else around me seemed to be.

It was really strange and unusual that night. In spite of all the rain just earlier that evening and in the past weeks, the sky was so clear and so dark you could see stars right down to the horizon. There was some houses way off in the distance, with their lights on, and it was hard to tell what was lights from the houses and what was stars. You don't often get that.

I stopped just outside his gate, stood there for a couple of long minutes before I even dared to go into his yard. And I guess I never knew how much noise a creaky old wooden gate could make until that night.

I got to the edge of the house and then, bent over nearly double and moving slow as I could, I snuck on over to the window. I stood up carefully at the corner of it and peeked in.

It seemed so bright inside. John was sitting alone at the kitchen table. He was looking right at the window, but I was sure he didn't see me. He appeared to be in a daze. He nodded his head. He did it again, like he was listening. I couldn't see anybody else in the room. There was a look of unhappiness on his face that I'll never forget, and it appeared like he had been weeping. He was just painful to see, is all.

Well sir, all of a sudden he starts to shake his head no, just a little and then a little more, and next harder and harder, like he

had had enough. And then he sort of throws the chair backward and jerks himself up real quick, till he was standing. He let out this long, low moan that got louder until it was a scream. And again he screamed.

Then he run out of the kitchen, wailing things all the while, but I couldn't make out what any of the words were.

Well, I was shocked so bad I could hardly move. But then I knew I had to do something, and so I circled the house slowly in the dark, trying for a look inside. There wasn't a light in any of the windows or anywhere else but the kitchen. I could hardly believe that. He had to be in there somewhere.

It was fully dark outside now, too, and I kicked a pail that I didn't see or it was some other fool thing, and I was scared he would hear. Or maybe I was scared he wouldn't hear, I don't know. But when I stood quiet, there was still only the silence.

Around the back of the house I was surprised that the river had got so close up the bank there that I had to be careful I did not slip into it as I circled. I could hear it moving by ever so slowly and ever so quietly. And it was a *lot* closer. Massive is what the Susquehanna river was that night. Dark, and quiet, and massive. And somehow majestic. Big rivers are like that.

I guess maybe it had got to within three feet of the house. Real close anyways. And it was still rising. I could hear clumps of sod falling in, washing away. It was an awesome thing, being in all that dark and knowing that the river was hissing quietly by almost tight up against the house, like a giant, slowly coiling snake that had a life of its own. I could *feel* it going by as well as hear it.

So I carefully worked my way round back to the kitchen window again, and I looked in, pretty boldly this time. But there was nothing unusual in there, except for how filthy it all was.

I waited for about five minutes. No sign of John returning. Everything was quiet. I'll tell you, I felt about as strange as I want to, just standing there. It could have been peaceful that night, except for what was going on in the house. Or what I feared was going on.

My stomach was really cramping up good by this time, and my hands were all cold, and my upper lip. It felt as if someone was sticking needles into the back of my neck.

I stood there for a few more minutes, trying to decide. And then just suddenly I knew what I had to do. Moving as quietly as was possible for me, I came round to the steps and eased up onto the porch. I stood in front of the door, hesitating.

My head was going this way and that. I wanted to run. But the Lehmanns were my friends, and I had to try to help, whatever the problem was.

I opened the door carefully. I moved inside, at first as quietly as I could, but then in consideration of John I decided to make as much noise as possible, so he wouldn't think I was sneaking around in his house.

"John?" I called.

There was no answer.

"Where are you, John?"

Again there was no answer of any kind.

Then I got to be really frightened for him. I figured to try upstairs first, and I climbed up the steps to the bedrooms just as quickly as my old legs would take me, looked in one after another of them, but neither John nor Carrie was anywhere. Each room was clean and neat and all made up. Next I got myself up the narrow steps to his attic, and I searched around everywhere, but all I saw was old cribs and picture frames and boxes tied with faded ribbons. It looked like no one had even been in the attic for years.

I stood up there shaking, and I expelled all the air that had been building up in my lungs. I forced myself to relax, and then I worked my way, slowly now, back down to the kitchen. I cannot tell you how depressed I had become. Their marriage, our friendship, the passing of the years, the joy of the last few weeks with them—all of it was a big whirl in my mind. I don't know what I expected to find up there, but I did expect to find *something*. Carrie was missing, that was for sure, and that was bad news. And John was not answering my calls.

Only the cellar was left.

I was tired enough by the time I got back to the kitchen that I had to sit down for a little. The table was cluttered with dirty dishes and empty quart jars. That depressed me even more, because it looked to me like John had been alone for a good while, eating peaches out of a jar like an old bachelor who no longer cared very much. Or maybe the peaches reminded him of Carrie, I don't know. Whatever it was, it was not a good sign either way.

God, my head was awlirl with all these strange thoughts!

I suppose I sat at that table for another five minutes, trying to calm myself. The only sound was the slow even ticking of John's Ansonia that Carrie brought him home from the Chicago World's Fair.

But it was inevitable. I knew I had to go into the cellar. Wherever

Carrie was, that was another story, but John, he couldn't be anyplace else but down there.

So I moved into the hallway, switched on the light, and stood in front of the cellar door. I know now what it means to be shaking like a leaf. I was so scared of what was ahead of me. I forced myself to wait for even a few more minutes till I got a better hold of my nerves.

Finally I was ready. I eased open the cellar door just wide enough to squeeze through, and then I stood at the little landing at the top. It was pitch dark down there, pitch dark, and I switched the landing light on and off, but the bulb was burnt out or loose or something because no light would go on. I couldn't hear anything or anybody downstairs.

"John?" I called out. "John?"

It's strange to me now, but I remember I called his name gently, almost as a loud whisper. Reverently even, I don't know. Like I was afraid to be too loud. That's a remarkable thing.

There was no answer.

I pushed open the cellar door as wide as I could to let in some light.

And until my eyes got used to the darkness I just sat down on the second step from the top and waited.

Still I heard nothing, but I could not get it out of my mind that John was down there somewhere, and he just was not answering my calls. Why, I could not say.

Then little by little I started to see shapes, and before long I could see most of the cellar. I could make out the furnace and the air ducts, a cluttered work table, the churn, things like that. Not good, but I could see them.

Nothing was moving. And I decided that I had guessed wrong when I figured John Lehmann was down there.

But I wanted to be sure, and so I slowly and quietly eased myself, still sitting, one step at a time lower till I was maybe a third of the way down and could see all around the cellar, both in front of the steps and behind them.

And then, God help me, I did see something. I was not in any way prepared for what was over on the far side, the side of the cellar along the river. I would never have guessed it in a million years.

Everything was still only in shades of gray, nothing had any color, but by this time I could see lots of detail. Close to the river wall was an old brass bed, with crumpled bedclothes. I guessed soon

enough that it was where John had been sleeping, it sure looked like it, down there in the cellar. Probably ever since Carrie had disappeared.

Then right away between the bed and the wall was a long mound, newly dug in the dirt floor. That took my breath away. I knew what it was all right. That mound was just long enough, and slightly rounded, and I knew what it was.

Lots of feelings went rushing through my head then. Fear, and anger, and pity, and hurt. And the inevitable, "Why?"

Aw-w, God, that scene did pain me so.

I could not imagine what the mound was doing down in the cellar. And why in the world he had buried her down there. She had died, sure enough, my fears were right, but Carrie belonged in a proper grave. She did. But here she was, down in a hidden pit in a moldy cellar. With a bed right next, and with the dark and mildew. It was such an awful place.

I do not think I can tell you just how sad and how alone I suddenly felt. With Carrie gone.

Then I was able to see John moving a little. I had missed him till that moment. He was kneeling at the head of the mound, with his hands clasped together. And he was trembling, I made that out. I didn't quite see his face, but he had to mean what he was doing, kneeling down there like that. He was praying, is what.

I could hardly believe he did not hear the noises I was making, nor the shouting. But he paid no attention. It was as if I did not exist.

Well, he was right next to the wall. And the wall was right close to the river. And there is no way to tell what happened next but to say it right out.

All of a sudden I caught hold of a noise, low down and far off, a kind of vague rushing sound. Then it got to be like a grinding noise. It grew. And it kept on. It got louder and louder and closer and closer until I could tell it was coming from *outside*. And still it got louder. Soon it was a roar, a loud whirring roar that was deep in the river and coming towards the house and then, whatever it was, it crashed into the cellar wall and broke clear through and forced the water through the hole like a piston. And that water lifted John clear up and smashed him hard against the wall right in front of my eyes.

In just no time at all.

The water came thundering through the hole now, wailing through the hole, and it thrust every which way just violent, and

I screamed and scrambled up the steps and out of the cellar just as the water pulled the steps away and filled the whole of the cellar. In only a few seconds. No more time than that.

And I run from the house as fast as I could just as the water swirled up out of the cellar and across the floor and out of the house.

I run till I couldn't go no further; up a little hill just about a hundred yards from my house. I fell down on the ground and couldn't move, I was so tired. I lay there aching and heaving and panting, and I was crying and scared out of my wits.

Then I sat up finally and forced myself to look. And what I saw didn't even seem real to me. The water was spilling out of the house it looked like in slow motion now, out of the door and the first floor windows, with odd little gurgling sounds, slowly, slowly, as if it had almost found its level. But it surrounded the house as it came out, and the house became like an island in a sudden little lake that was connected to the river.

In nothing but the moonlight it was an eerie sight, let me tell you. The moon glistening easy on the water. And the house all black.

John was done for, that I knew. He was finished.

Well, the house started to creak and groan now, from the heavy tow of the river, and the pressure got to pulling at it and pulling at it until it started to come up and away. It began to break apart and splinter, with awesome tearing sounds, and it wasn't too long before there wasn't no house there at all. The house was gone, torn all to pieces.

And then all the pieces of it floated slowly away, almost like each piece took its own turn, until there wasn't even nothing left to see. And the river smoothed down again, as if the house in the moonlight never even existed.

There was one great deep swirl in the water right out in front of me. It lasted for only a few seconds, and then it was gone too.

John and Carrie Lehmann and their farm had disappeared forever, just like that.

That's the story.

I know how crazy it sounds, but there was a live thing in the water, that I *know*. I don't know *what* it was, or where it come from, but something smashed a hole in John's cellar, right through from the river, and the high water that come in took away the house and everything in it and left only that silent inlet when everything was gone. Right in front of my eyes. And there was that

great swirl. Something alive did that. So I *know* what I'm talking about.

But there are lots of things I don't know.

For instance, I know what happened to John. I know how he died. There is no question about that. But I don't think I or anyone will ever know what happened to Carrie.

I hope she died natural. I know deep in my heart it wasn't John that did it, I know him too well, but I just hope she died natural. I hope it wasn't nothing else. I mean, I hope it wasn't nothing *she* did, or caused to happen.

I'm sure as I'm sure I'm gonna die myself one day that she was down there, though. And whatever happened to her, John just went crazy with grief. It had to be that.

I never told anyone what I saw. Right away when it happened there was talk about the bad flood in the valley below Garlock's Bend, about all the heavy rains, and about poor John and poor Carrie.

But I never told. I figured it was no one's business but mine. It was me that seen it, and I had to deal with it in my own way.

Just about that time there was some trouble right up in Garlock's Bend, in the church, and I was there through the whole of that one, too, but I hid the fact that some of it seemed so much the same to me.

I don't know, I guess I thought that one problem at a time was enough. But partly I kept quiet on account of Carrie. She was scared about something, she said. And she wanted to get back home because of the high water. She said it wasn't safe because of the high water. And she used a line about the water being high enough for "... it to ..." What the *it* was, and what it could do, those are good questions.

She had to know something, or she wouldn't have talked like that.

So, I guess somehow not to stir things up, I didn't tell. Maybe, considering everything, that was wrong.

Maybe.

But then come *all* the maybes.

Maybe Carrie was innocent of anything bad, and I'm doing her a terrible injustice, thinking the evil things that go through my mind so often. I hope so. I hope to God she was innocent. I hope to God she was.

But maybe, just maybe she was involved in something or controlled by something or even just aware of something so wrong that

I can't even comprehend it. She had predicted the trouble to come, so at the very least, she *knew* of this thing in the water. She had to know of it. How she knew, and why, no one will ever get a handle on that.

Some things, I guess, it's maybe even better not to understand. What good would it do anyway?

John now, I don't know. That time we talked and I wanted to come in to see him, he did say that he was forbidden to let anybody in, he was "... just not allowed to." Whatever that meant. He sounded so weak and so frightened. Somehow, though, I get the feeling that he knew a whole lot less than Carrie did.

All of this sounds crazy, and just even impossible, but there it is. I know it happened because I went through it, and I'm telling the truth. The sad thing is, I'm sure in my heart of hearts that I'll never have the answers. That's the terrible thing for me, not knowing the truth about Carrie.

But one thing is certain—something alive was in the water. That much I know. I *know* that. Something alive that come from the river.

My guess is it's still there. Wherever it come from, it's still out there somewhere. Waiting, maybe?

You get these little hints at Miller's, like maybe a few other people have been through something, too, but they have decided to keep quiet.

There's a thought could make anyone afraid.

Carrie's been on my mind a lot lately. In my quiet times. Her and those ice blue eyes and all the passing years. And what I thought was lifelong innocence. And always I'm left with the questions that keep coming back. What did she know? What did she do? And *why*?

And the question of questions—what took her?

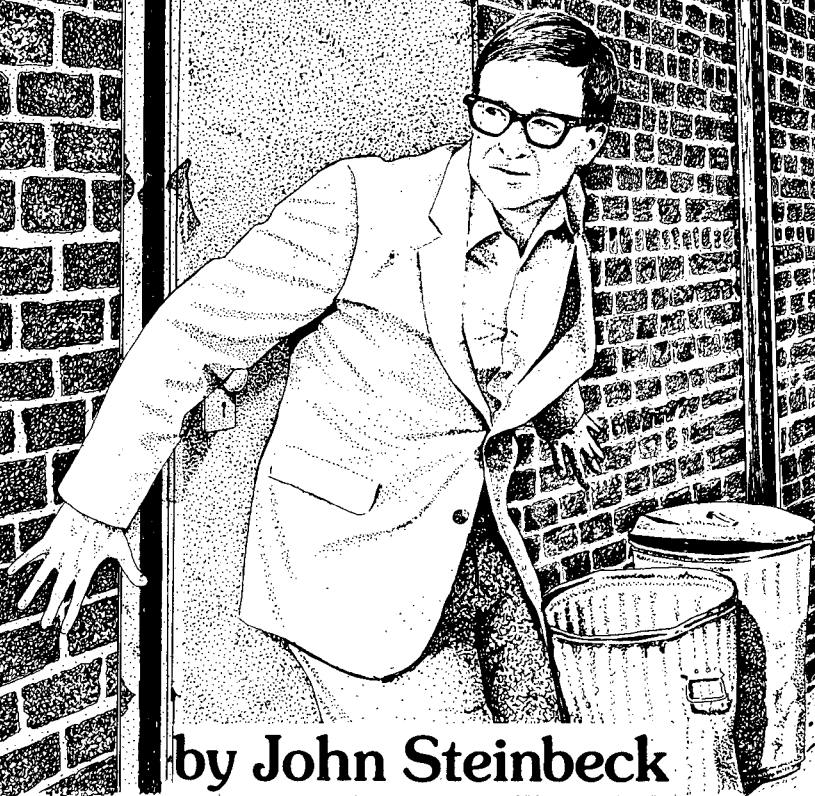
Well, whatever came for them out of the river, whatever it was that happened to them both, John did love her, no matter the cost to him in the end. He hung on like a man, too, and you can't ask for more than that. Even if he died because of her, because of something she did, I believe he still loved her. I do.

And maybe, at the last, that's partly why I'm so troubled by the whole story myself, why I have so many questions, why I feel so much dread.

I loved her too, you see.

MYSTERY CLASSIC

How Mr. Hogan Robbed a Bank



by John Steinbeck

On the Saturday before Labor Day, 1955, at 9:04½ A.M., Mr. Hogan robbed a bank. He was forty-two years old, married, and the father of a boy and a girl, named John and Joan, twelve and thirteen respectively. Mrs. Hogan's name was Joan and Mr. Hogan's was John, but since they called themselves Papa and Mama that left their names free for the children, who were considered very smart for their ages, each having jumped a grade in school. The Hogans lived at 215 East Maple Street, in a brown-shingle house with white trim—there are two. Two fifteen is the one across from the street light and it is the one with the big tree in the yard, either oak or elm—the biggest tree in the whole street, maybe in the whole town.

John and Joan were in bed at the time of the robbery, for it was Saturday. At 9:10 A.M., Mrs. Hogan was making the cup of tea she always had. Mr. Hogan went to work early. Mrs. Hogan drank her tea slowly, scalding hot, and read her fortune in the tea leaves. There was a cloud and a five-pointed star with two short points in the bottom of the cup, but that was at 9:12 and the robbery was all over by then.

The way Mr. Hogan went about robbing the bank was very interesting. He gave it a great deal of thought and had for a long time, but he did not discuss it with anyone. He just read his newspaper and kept his own counsel. But he worked it out to his own satisfaction that people went to too much trouble robbing banks and that got them in a mess. The simpler the better, he always thought. People went in for too much hullabaloo and hanky-panky. If you didn't do that, if you left hanky-panky out, robbing a bank would be a relatively sound venture—barring accidents, of course, of an improbable kind, but then they could happen to a man crossing the street or anything. Since Mr. Hogan's method worked fine, it proved that his thinking was sound. He often considered writing a little booklet on his technique when the how-to rage was running so high. He figured out the first sentence, which went: "To successfully rob a bank, forget all about hanky-panky."

Mr. Hogan was not just a clerk at Fettucci's grocery store. He was more like the manager. Mr. Hogan was in charge, even hired and fired the boy who delivered groceries after school. He even put in orders with the salesmen, sometimes when Mr. Fettucci was right in the store, too, maybe talking to a customer. "You do it, John," he would say and he would nod at the customer, "John

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knows the ropes. Been with me—how long you been with me, John?”

“Sixteen years.”

“Sixteen years. Knows the business as good as me. John, why he even banks the money.”

And so he did. Whenever he had a moment, Mr. Hogan went into the storeroom on the alley, took off his apron, put on his necktie and coat, and went back through the store to the cash register. The checks and bills would be ready for him inside the bankbook with a rubber band around it. Then he went next door and stood at the teller's window and handed the checks and bankbook through to Mr. Cup and passed the time of day with him too. Then, when the bankbook was handed back, he checked the entry, put the rubber band around it, and walked next door to Fettucci's grocery and put the bankbook in the cash register, continued on to the storeroom, removed his coat and tie, put on his apron, and went back into the store ready for business. If there was no line at the teller's window, the whole thing didn't take more than five minutes, even passing the time of day.

Mr. Hogan was a man who noticed things, and when it came to robbing the bank, this trait stood him in good stead. He had noticed, for instance, where the big bills were kept, right in the drawer under the counter, and he had noticed also what days there were likely to be more than other days. Thursday was payday at the American Can Company's local plant, for instance, so there would be more then. Some Fridays people drew more money to tide them over the weekend. But it was even Steven, maybe not a thousand dollars' difference between Thursdays and Fridays and Saturday mornings. Saturdays were not terribly good because people didn't come to get money that early in the morning, and the bank closed at noon. But he thought it over and came to the conclusion that the Saturday before a long weekend in the summer would be the best of all. People going on trips, vacations, people with relatives visiting, and the bank closed Monday. He thought it out and looked, and sure enough the Saturday morning before Labor Day the cash drawer had twice as much money in it—he saw it when Mr. Cup pulled out the drawer.

Mr. Hogan thought about it during all that year, not all the time, of course, but when he had some moments. It was a busy year, too. That was the year John and Joan had the mumps and Mrs. Hogan got her teeth pulled and was fitted for a denture. That was the

year when Mr. Hogan was Master of the Lodge, with all the time that takes. Larry Shield died that year—he was Mrs. Hogan's brother and was buried from the Hogan house at 215 East Maple. Larry was a bachelor and had a room in the Pine Tree House and he played pool nearly every night. He worked at the Silver Diner but that closed at nine and so Larry would go to Louie's and play pool for an hour. Therefore, it was a surprise when he left enough so that after funeral expenses there was twelve hundred dollars left. And even more surprising that he left a will in Mrs. Hogan's favor, but his double-barreled twelve-gauge shotgun he left to John Hogan, Jr. Mr. Hogan was pleased, although he never hunted. He put the shotgun away in the back of the closet in the bathroom, where he kept his things, to keep it for young John. He didn't want children handling guns and he never bought any shells. It was some of that twelve hundred that got Mrs. Hogan her dentures. Also, she bought a bicycle for John and a doll buggy and walking-talking doll for Joan—a doll with three changes of dresses and a little suitcase, complete with play makeup. Mr. Hogan thought it might spoil the children, but it didn't seem to. They made just as good marks in school and John even got a job delivering papers. It was a very busy year. Both John and Joan wanted to enter the W.R. Hearst National "I Love America" Contest and Mr. Hogan thought it was almost too much, but they promised to do the work during their summer vacation, so he finally agreed.

[2]

During that year, no one noticed any difference in Mr. Hogan. It was true, he was thinking about robbing a bank, but he only thought about it in the evening when there was neither a lodge meeting nor a movie they wanted to go to, so it did not become an obsession and people noticed no change in him.

He had studied everything so carefully that the approach of Labor Day did not catch him unprepared or nervous. It was hot that summer and the hot spells were longer than usual. Saturday was the end of two weeks' heat without a break and people were irritated with it and anxious to get out of town, although the country was just as hot. They didn't think of that. The children were excited because the "I Love America" Essay Contest was due to be concluded and the winners announced, and the first prize was an all-expense-paid two days' trip to Washington, D.C., with every fix-

ing—hotel room, three meals a day, and side trips in a limousine—not only for the winner, but for an accompanying chaperone; visit to the White House—shake hands with the president—everything. Mr. Hogan thought they were getting their hopes too high and he said so.

"You've got to be prepared to lose," he told his children. "There're probably thousands and thousands entered. You get your hopes up and it might spoil the whole autumn. Now I don't want any long faces in this house after the contest is over.

"I was against it from the start," he told Mrs. Hogan. That was the morning she saw the Washington Monument in her teacup, but she didn't tell anybody about that except Ruth Tyler, Bob Tyler's wife. Ruthie brought over her cards and read them in the Hogan kitchen, but she didn't find a journey. She did tell Mrs. Hogan that the cards were often wrong. The cards had said Mrs. Winkle was going on a trip to Europe and the next week Mrs. Winkle got a fishbone in her throat and choked to death. Ruthie, just thinking out loud, wondered if there was any connection between the fishbone and the ocean voyage to Europe. "You've got to interpret them right." Ruthie did say she saw money coming to the Hogans.

"Oh, I got that already from poor Larry," Mrs. Hogan explained.

"I must have got the past and future cards mixed," said Ruthie. "You've got to interpret them right."

Saturday dawned a blaster. The early morning weather report on the radio said, "Continued hot and humid, light scattered rain Sunday night and Monday." Mrs. Hogan said, "Wouldn't you know? Labor Day." And Mr. Hogan said, "I'm sure glad we didn't plan anything." He finished his egg and mopped the plate with his toast. Mrs. Hogan said, "Did I put coffee on the list?" He took the paper from his handkerchief pocket and consulted it. "Yes, coffee, it's here."

"I had a crazy idea I forgot to write it down," said Mrs. Hogan. "Ruth and I are going to Altar Guild this afternoon. It's at Mrs. Alfred Drake's. You know, they just came to town. I can't wait to see their furniture."

"They trade with us," said Mr. Hogan. "Opened an account last week. Are the milk bottles ready?"

"On the porch."

Mr. Hogan looked at his watch just before he picked up the bottles and it was five minutes to eight. He was about to go down the

stairs, when he turned and looked back through the opened door at Mrs. Hogan. She said, "Want something, Papa?"

"No," he said. "No," and he walked down the steps.

He went down to the corner and turned right on Spooner, and Spooner runs into Main Street in two blocks, and right across from where it runs in, there is Fettucci's and the bank around the corner and the alley beside the bank. Mr. Hogan picked up a handbill in front of Fettucci's and unlocked the door. He went through to the storeroom, opened the door to the alley, and looked out. A cat tried to force its way in, but Mr. Hogan blocked it with his foot and leg and closed the door. He took off his coat and put on his long apron, tied the strings in a bowknot behind his back. Then he got the broom from behind the counter and swept out behind the counters and scooped the sweepings into a dustpan; and, going through the storeroom, he opened the door to the alley. The cat had gone away. He emptied the dustpan into the garbage can and tapped it smartly to dislodge a piece of lettuce leaf. Then he went back to the store and worked for a while on the order sheet. Mrs. Clooney came in for half a pound of bacon. She said it was hot and Mr. Hogan agreed. "Summers are getting hotter," he said.

"I think so myself," said Mrs. Clooney. "How's Mrs. standing up?"

"Just fine," said Mr. Hogan. "She's going to Altar Guild."

"So am I. I just can't wait to see their furniture," said Mrs. Clooney, and she went out.

[3]

Mr. Hogan put a five-pound hunk of bacon on the slicer and stripped off the pieces and laid them on wax paper and then he put the wax-paper-covered squares in the cooler cabinet. At ten minutes to nine, Mr. Hogan went to a shelf. He pushed a spaghetti box aside and took down a cereal box, which he emptied in the little closet toilet. Then, with a banana knife, he cut out the Mickey Mouse mask that was on the back. The rest of the box he took to the toilet and tore up the cardboard and flushed it down. He went into the store then and yanked a piece of string loose and tied the ends through the side holes of the mask and then he looked at his watch—a large silver Hamilton with black hands. It was two minutes to nine.

Perhaps the next four minutes were his only time of nervousness at all. At one minute to nine, he took the broom and went out to

sweep the sidewalk and he swept it very rapidly—was sweeping it, in fact, when Mr. Warner unlocked the bank door. He said good morning to Mr. Warner and a few seconds later the bank staff of four emerged from the coffee shop. Mr. Hogan saw them across the street and he waved at them and they waved back. He finished the sidewalk and went back in the store. He laid his watch on the little step of the cash register. He sighed very deeply, more like a deep breath than a sigh. He knew that Mr. Warner would have the safe open now and he would be carrying the cash trays to the teller's window. Mr. Hogan looked at the watch on the cash register step. Mr. Kenworthy paused in the store entrance, then shook his head vaguely and walked on and Mr. Hogan let out his breath gradually. His left hand went behind his back and pulled the bowknot on his apron, and then the black hand on his watch crept up on the four-minute mark and covered it.

Mr. Hogan opened the charge account drawer and took out the store pistol, a silver-colored Iver Johnson .38. He moved quickly to the storeroom, slipped off his apron, put on his coat, and stuck the revolver in his side pocket. The Mickey Mouse mask he shoved up under his coat where it didn't show. He opened the alley door and looked up and down and stepped quickly out, leaving the door slightly ajar. It is sixty feet to where the alley enters Main Street, and there he paused and looked up and down and then he turned his head toward the center of the street as he passed the bank window. At the bank's swinging door, he took out the mask from under his coat and put it on. Mr. Warner was just entering his office and his back was to the door. The top of Will Cup's head was visible through the teller's grill.

Mr. Hogan moved quickly and quietly around the end of the counter and into the teller's cage. He had the revolver in his right hand now. When Will Cup turned his head and saw the revolver, he froze. Mr. Hogan slipped his toe under the trigger of the floor alarm and he motioned Will Cup to the floor with the revolver and Will went down quick. Then Mr. Hogan opened the cash drawer and with two quick movements he piled the large bills from the tray together. He made a whipping motion to Will on the floor, to indicate that he should turn over and face the wall, and Will did. Then Mr. Hogan stepped back around the counter. At the door of the bank, he took off the mask, and as he passed the window he turned his head toward the middle of the street. He moved into the alley, walked quickly to the storeroom, and entered. The cat had

got in. It watched him from a pile of canned goods cartons. Mr. Hogan went to the toilet closet and tore up the mask and flushed it. He took off his coat and put on his apron. He looked out into the store and then moved to the cash register. The revolver went back into the charge account drawer. He punched No Sale and, lifting the top drawer, distributed the stolen money underneath the top tray and then pulled the tray forward and closed the register, and only then did he look at his watch and it was 9:07½.

He was trying to get the cat out of the storeroom when the commotion boiled out of the bank. He took his broom and went out on the sidewalk. He heard all about it and offered his opinion when it was asked for. He said he didn't think the fellow could get away—where could he get to? Still, with the holiday coming up—

It was an exciting day. Mr. Fettucci was as proud as though it were his bank. The sirens sounded around town for hours. Hundreds of holiday travelers had to stop at the roadblocks set up all around the edge of town and several sneaky-looking men had their cars searched.

Mrs. Hogan heard about it over the phone and she dressed earlier than she would have ordinarily and came to the store on her way to Altar Guild. She hoped Mr. Hogan would have seen or heard something new, but he hadn't. "I don't see how the fellow can get away," he said.

Mrs. Hogan was so excited she forgot her own news. She only remembered when she got to Mrs. Drake's house, but she asked permission and phoned the store the first moment she could. "I forgot to tell you. John's won honorable mention."

"What?"

"In the 'I Love America' Contest."

"What did he win?"

"Honorable mention."

"Fine. Fine—Anything come with it?"

"Why, he'll get his picture and his name all over the country. Radio, too. Maybe even television. They've already asked for a photograph of him."

"Fine," said Mr. Hogan. "I hope it don't spoil him." He put up the receiver and said to Mr. Fettucci, "I guess we've got a celebrity in the family."

Fettucci stayed open until nine on Saturdays. Mr. Hogan ate a few snacks from cold cuts, but not much, because Mrs. Hogan always kept his supper warming.

It was 9:05, or :06, or :07, when he got back to the brown-shingle house at 215 East Maple. He went in through the front door and out to the kitchen where the family was waiting for him.

"Got to wash up," he said, and went up to the bathroom. He turned the key in the bathroom door and then he flushed the toilet and turned on the water in the basin and tub while he counted the money. Eight thousand three hundred and twenty dollars. From the top shelf of the storage closet in the bathroom, he took down the big leather case that held his Knight Templar's uniform. The plumed hat lay there on its form. The white ostrich feather was a little yellow and needed changing. Mr. Hogan lifted out the hat and pried the form up from the bottom of the case. He put the money in the form and then he thought again and removed two bills and shoved them in his side pocket. Then he put the form back over the money and laid the hat on top and closed the case and shoved it back on the top shelf. Finally he washed his hands and turned off the water in the tub and the basin.

In the kitchen, Mrs. Hogan and the children faced him, beaming. "Guess what some young man's going on?"

"What?" asked Mr. Hogan.

"Radio," said John. "Monday night. Eight o'clock."

"I guess we got a celebrity in the family," said Mr. Hogan.

Mrs. Hogan said, "I just hope some young lady hasn't got her nose out of joint."

Mr. Hogan pulled up to the table and stretched his legs. "Mama, I guess I got a fine family," he said. He reached in his pocket and took out two five-dollar bills. He handed one to John. "That's for winning," he said. He poked the other bill at Joan. "And that's for being a good sport. One celebrity and one good sport. What a fine family!" He rubbed his hands together and lifted the lid of the covered dish. "Kidneys," he said. "Fine."

And that's how Mr. Hogan did it.

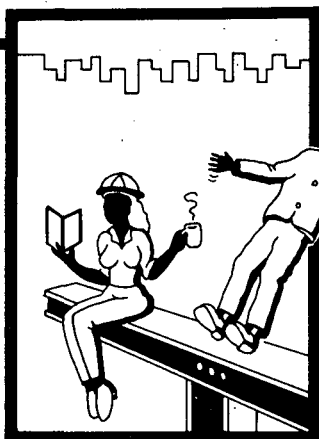
SOLUTION TO THE DECEMBER "UNSOLVED":

The man with the black mask.

BOOKED & PRINTED

by Mary Cannon

Illustration by Jim Gilsen



Dear Miss Demeanor (St. Martin's, \$13.95, 186 pp.) is Joan Hess's latest Claire Malloy adventure, and it's a treat. This time the intrepid bookseller is cajoled by her teenaged daughter into substituting at the high school for a beloved old teacher who has been accused of embezzling student funds and suspended pending an investigation. Claire's daughter believes the charges are false, and urges her mom to clear the woman's name. Claire's just beginning to mentally catalog the school's most colorful characters—almost all of whom occupy the teachers' lounge rather than the students'—when the wildly unpopular principal is well and truly "terminated." Now things look very black for the oldtimer. There's irony in the solution, and not a few laughs along the way.

In an entirely different vein is Ed McBain's latest Matthew Hope novel. **Puss in Boots** (Henry Holt, \$15.95, 248 pp.) finds the Floridian lawyer, in his newly-adopted career as criminal counsel, defending a man who's been accused of murdering his wife. Hope believes there's a vital clue in the missing can of film which the woman had been working on as director. McBain's sure skills as storyteller make this slide down pretty easily considering that the tale—one of greed, double-crossing, pornography, and sadistic, psychopathic revenge—is unrelievedly grim. Not for the faint of heart.

Seminar for Murder (Ballantine, \$2.95, 181 pp.) should please fans of the conventional Scotland Yard mystery. Detective Chief Inspector Tom Maybridge is the guest speaker at a weekend gathering of the Golden Guillotine Club, a group of mystery writers and aspiring amateurs headed by Sir Godfrey Grant. Grant's a wealthy, successful author whose aim in founding the club was allegedly to advance the cause of mystery writing. It soon becomes apparent, however, that the great man's motives never bear up under close inspection, and that he is thoroughly despised by one and all. Maybridge's little talk—which includes very specific criticisms of the murder methods employed in their novels by the attendees—does little to lighten the mood. But a murderous mood shouldn't have led to murder, in spite of the killer's taunting message to Maybridge. Author B.M. Gill hasn't given readers a particularly attractive hero in Maybridge, but the novel has so many classic elements that it's definitely worth a read.

Dan Roman is a Texas P.I., and the locale is certainly part of the appeal in Edward Mathis's **From a High Place** (Ballantine, \$3.95, 278 pp.). Dan's back home for a brief visit when he's enlisted by a former schoolteacher to investigate the recent death of her husband. The husband's past proves to be a lot more interesting than the townspeople had assumed, but it's Roman's past that keeps bumping into him: his best buddy, now the town sheriff; his old girlfriend, now the widow of the town's rich boy; and other characters from his high school days. This is better than average private eye fare, peopled with recognizable characters and written with a clear eye.

The Best Cellar by Charles Goodrum is subtitled *Murder and Mystery at the Werner Bok Library*, which should give readers a clue as to what they'll find inside. This latest reunites Crichton Jones, Steve Carson, and Edward George—librarians and scholars all—in a caper that begins as a missing persons case, and ends as a missing *library* case. But I cannot tell more without revealing my sources. I recommend you read it yourself if you like your mysteries light-hearted and academic, especially if you're a fan of Thomas Jefferson, who plays a part in the main plotline. (St. Martin's, \$13.95, 218 pp.)

A new novel by Mary Logue (Dell, \$3.95, 304 pp.), **Red Lake of the Heart** poignantly explores the bond between sisters when Amy's younger sibling Tricia is found dead in her own bed, the obvious casualty of an S&M encounter that turned deadly. Though

she had been spending a lot of psychic energy and time trying to help Tricia remain sober, Amy soon discovers that the shocking fact of her sister's murder is an even greater barrier to her own chances of happiness—her promising dance career, even a rekindled romance. She feels she has no choice but to discover the whole truth about Tricia by retracing her sister's steps—thus running a high risk that could prove fatal for her, too. A Minneapolis setting, a sympathetic protagonist, and Logue's cool narrative voice are additional strong points in this heart-clutching tale of psychological suspense.

(Continued from page 3)

Other clues? They took showers—there were wet towels in the bathroom—and washed clothes. The evidence for that was threefold: a pair of boy's briefs, size 12, found behind the washing machine; an empty box of Clorox, ditto; and at least two loads' worth of lint in the dryer (our friends clean the lint out after each use). They did take one pair of good winter boots, size 10 medium, the only really expensive thing that was gone. They tossed several beer cans onto the lawn (drunk while waiting for the washing to get done?) and left behind a telltale odor of cigarette smoke—but no cigarette butts or other trash was found in the house. They broke a previously opened bottle of pasta sauce (a small stain was found on the kitchen rug) and put the bits of glass and sauce-stained paper towels used to wipe it up under the deck of the house. And they took an old

set of men's running clothes—but left behind a large supply of other clothes. Everything except the beer cans and broken sauce bottle was left in perfect order; dust cloths over furniture (from the drawers of which items like paper napkins had vanished) were in place. They did, however, eat three leftover blueberry muffins from an Entenmann's box in the refrigerator—and put back the empty box. There was no sign of forced entry, though it's possible they found a key hidden on the property (and still in its hiding place when our friends arrived).

Campers making a pit stop? But *toothbrushes*? And cups but not saucers or mugs? The local constabulary just shook their heads.

Anybody out there have any ideas? Let us know what you come up with; we'll print as many of your replies and ingenious solutions as we can in a future issue.



Playing Dead

by *Matthew J. Costello*

Surely most of us have "played dead" at one time or another. "Bang!" some other runny-nosed kid would yell at you, and you'd twist, turn, grab at your mid-section (yes, a fatal wound this time), and finally tumble to the ground with all the theatrical grace an eight-year-old can muster. Then, after pausing a few tortuous minutes—playing at being a corpse can be an unsettling experience—you stand, miraculously reborn and ready once again to face death.

Sure, we all played that.

But I don't recall playing "murder." No, the careful plotting of someone's imaginary death or, on the other hand, the relentless tracking down of a killer on the loose wasn't a common fantasy for most kids.

Maybe it was because we knew that there were really such things as murderers. At least in Brooklyn where I grew up there were. Cowboys, Indi-

ans, and spacemen we never saw.

Adults, on the other hand, seem to have a lively interest in crime and its resolution. Mystery fans have long played a game of cat-and-mouse with the author, trying to sift through red herrings for the real clues and deriving satisfaction from solving the crime before the grand revelation scene. These days a host of mystery games bring the world of murder and mayhem safely to life.

Parker Brothers' *VCR Clue* (Parker Brothers, 50 Dunham Road, Beverly, Massachusetts 01915) unleashed a host of VCR games copying what was a successful new format, but none of them displayed the cleverness of the original. Now there's *Clue II*, a successful follow-up to that best-selling game.

In the original *VCR Clue* there were three mysteries with six different solutions. Mr.

"Murder by Direction" by Peter Shaw, the column that usually occupies this space, will return in the next issue.—ED.

Green, Mrs. White, sleek Miss Scarlet, and the rest of the adroitly acted suspects stumbled around the manor of the dead Mr. Boddy. The game depended on card play, careful observation, and was replayable many, many times.

The *Clue II, Murder in Disguise* VCR game takes the same cast of characters out of the mansion and launches them on an around-the-world trip as Inspector Pry hunts them down. *Clue II* features great background locations like Paris, Tangiers, and Rangoon, and like its predecessor *Clue II* has eighteen different cases and over forty murders, more than enough for any crime fan.

VCR games, largely due to *Clue*, have become a hot item. Spinnaker's **Agatha Christie's Behind the Screen** (Spinnaker Software Corp., 1 Kendall Square, Cambridge, Mass. 02139) is another clever one. In this game there is one murder mystery with over two hundred fifty different endings. Paul Dudden, playboy, is found murdered. Nearly everyone had a motive to murder the cad, and for every possible murderer, there are two or three alibis. Players use detective cards to uncover hidden evidence, and a special color view-screen is used to reveal the correct solution.

While some computer owners persist in using their machines for useful things like doing taxes, writing thank-you notes, and helping Junior learn his alphabet, many people continue to use them for games. Two recent games offer a chance to test your sleuthing ability to the maximum.

Killed Until Dead (Accolade, 20813 Stevens Creek Boulevard, Cupertino, California 95014) is a high-tech simulation of a modern detective at work. You play the detective and at your desk you can select a variety of activities. You can call each of the suspects and interrogate them (but you'd better have some idea what you're looking for). You can break into their rooms (if they're not at home) and you can answer a bit of mystery trivia. The trivia questions are a piece of cake for the mystery maven (e.g., who chronicled the exploits of Philip Marlowe?), but they're fun to do.

I should mention that this is contemporary investigation work. You can set up surveillance cameras all over the mansion and set the time to videotape what transpires there. But the cameras are limited, so it is important to get some clues as to what locations need to be staked out. And, amazingly enough, you can go back to the

cameras and rewind the tape to see what happened.

While you're investigating, the game's clock continues to run and, if you haven't figured out the murderer by midnight, he or she enters your office and claims the next victim—you.

A different kind of sleuthing can be found in **The Lurking Horror** (Infocom, 125 Cambridge Park Drive, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02140). This is a chilling computer game from the company that made text adventures famous. In a text adventure you meet characters and visit locations by typing instructions which the program responds to. Infocom has released everything from *Dungeons and Dragons* types of adventures to tongue-in-cheek simulations of modern living, called *Bureaucracy*. But *The Lurking Horror* is their first foray into a full-scale horror mystery.

The plot is a lively mixture of Stephen King and H.P. Lovecraft, set at the George Underwood Edwards Institute of Technology. Apparently old books aren't the only things to be found in the labyrinth of tunnels and corridors buried under the sprawling, bucolic campus.

As usual, Infocom puts a lot of goodies into the game box. There's a plastic creature of some kind (with dozens of legs

and a nice slimy, wet appearance). There's also a student I.D. card and "C.U.E. at a Glance, a Guide for Freshmen."

The guidebook alone is worth the price of admission, featuring a quote from George Underwood Edwards himself: "He who climbs the steps of knowledge stands out among common men like a blueberry in a pan of milk." The guide also explains special school traditions, like Pigeon Day—"The president rings a bell a six A.M. one spring morning and puts a statue of a giant pigeon on the lawn. No classes for the day; free food at night."

In the back there's an ad for Murray's Limbo Bookstore, whose motto for buying and selling used books is "How Low Can You Go?"

Despite all this frivolity, Infocom's *The Lurking Horror* is a deftly entertaining horror mystery, scary and challenging.

Fans of horror have long known the lure of H.P. Lovecraft's stories, laced with purple prose and ghostly goings-on. **Call of Cthulu** (Chaosium, Inc., Box 6302, Albany, California 94706) is an award-winning game that lets players take the role of investigators inquiring into strange occurrences during the Roaring Twenties. The game mixes flappers with flippers

from beyond, and a game session can be an appropriately chilling experience.

Terror Australis, recently released for *Call of Cthulu*, features background and adventure scenarios for playing the game "down under." It includes maps and guide to the myths and monsters of Australia.

Of course board games continue to be popular, letting the imagination provide most of the thrills. **Murder She Wrote** (Warren Company, Inc., 3200 South Street, Lafayette, Indiana 47903) is a clever mystery board game based on the popular television show. The witnesses to a murder are in danger, and Jessica Fletcher must uncover the murderer before there's more killing. Time is important here, and it may be difficult finding out the murderer before it's too late.

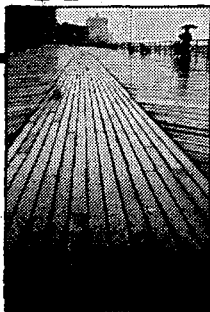
Lastly, for those who prefer to mix canapes and crime, there's a host (no pun intended)

of murder party games. Here the idea is to invite some friends over for cocktails and sleuthing.

How To Host a Murder (Decipher, Inc. P.O. Box 56, Norfolk, Virginia 23501) recently released "The Last Train From Paris," offering a romantic mystery set on the last train to leave Paris before the German Occupation. All of Decipher's mysteries are set in the past, for four men and four women.

Jamie Swise Mystery Games (Just Games) offers everything from *Murder in Paradise* (a South Pacific vacation gone sour) to *The Three Ring Murder* where everyone takes the role of a circus performer. To be sure, murder mystery party games are not for everyone. Just be certain you inform your guests before they arrive. Parties can be surprising enough without arriving unannounced at a murder.

THE STORY THAT WON



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The August Mysterious Photograph contest (photo above) was won by Charles Elder of Red Deer, Alberta, Canada. Honorable mentions go to John S. Bulanda of Buffalo Grove, Illinois; Jon K. Evans of Los Angeles, California; Markam Keith Adams of Tampa, Florida; Mary E. McClintock of Wapakoneta, Ohio; R. Stewart of Oakland, California; Jaenne McCrory of Sacramento, California; Jo Taylor of Madison, Wisconsin; G. Cox of Somerville, New Jersey; Yvette DeCameron of Los Angeles, California; Joe Nazare of Lyndhurst, New Jersey; Steve Dusheck of Hazleton, Pennsylvania; and Lynda Best of Sierra Vista, Arizona.

JAKE by Charles Elder

Standing in the rain, Jake surveyed the boardwalk. He couldn't believe the good luck he had had this past week. Only a month ago his only relative died and left him one hundred thousand dollars; more money than he had ever seen in his life. All his friends kept telling him to go to the Big City and see what he'd been missing. That sounded good to him, so he sold his farm and headed for a new and better life.

Looking at the boardwalk, Jake knew that his friends had been right. He then thought of the thousands of tourists that would be using the boardwalk when the good weather came, and at fifty cents per person, he would be a millionaire in a very short time. Of course he'd have to hire some people to cover all the tollbooths that he'd have to set up, but it was a small price to pay for the return expected.

"Well, I'd better get started," he thought. "I sure am lucky that fellow I bought the Brooklyn Bridge from told me about his friend here in Atlantic City."

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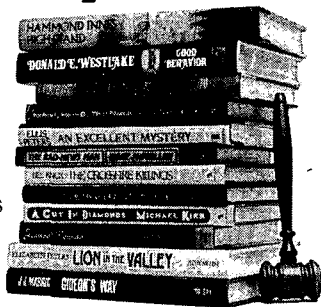
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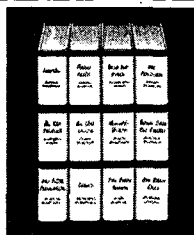


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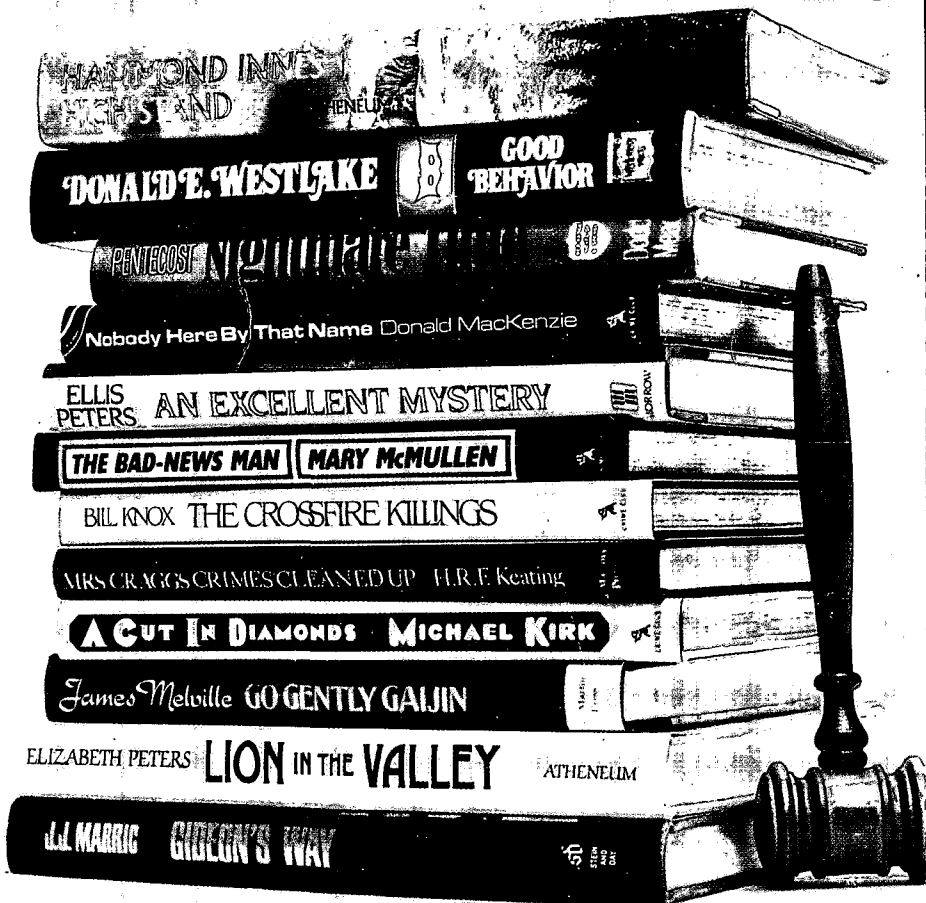
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